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The Anti-Zionism of Fools: How Scapegoating Jews Serves Zionism

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The Israeli assault on Gaza has unleashed a level of destruction and mass killing without precedent in the 21st century. Under the pretext of fighting Hamas and freeing hostages, the Israeli regime has carried out widespread killing and forced displacement: tens of thousands dead, nearly two million driven from their homes, hospitals and schools deliberately destroyed, famine used as a weapon of war.[2] Israeli and U.S. leaders now openly discuss plans for removing Palestinians altogether and converting Gaza into prime beachfront resort property.[3]

This devastation has produced an equally unprecedented wave of global opposition to Israel.[4] Recent studies by Pew Research Center confirm that in 20 of 24 countries surveyed, at least half of adults hold unfavorable views of Israel.[5] In the U.S., for the first time in recent memory, a majority of adults (53%) say they view Israel unfavorably.[6] Yet this sea-change in public opinion has not translated into government policy: the ruling elites in the West remain united in lockstep support behind the Zionist regime. International law, however, has moved decisively. In 2023 the International Criminal Court ruled there was a "plausible case" of genocide against Israel, and in 2025 the UN Human Rights Council went further, officially recognizing that Israel is committing genocide.[7] This global backlash has not gone unnoticed by Israel's leaders. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, in a recent speech, admitted that Israel faces deepening isolation, and declared that its only path forward is to

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2. Visual Journalism Team, "Gaza Strip in Maps: How 15 Months of War Have Drastically Changed Life in the Territory," *BBC News*, January 16, 2025, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-20415675.

3. Dareh Gregorian, "Trump Proposes U.S. Control of Gaza in Move That Would Permanently Displace Palestinians," *NBC News*, February 4, 2025, https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/white-house/donald-trump-israeli-prime-minister-benjamin-netanyahu-meeting-rcna190449

4. Joseph Krauss, "Israel Is Increasingly Being Treated as a Global Pariah. It's Shielded by Trump, for Now," *Washington Post*, September 25, 2025, https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/2025/09/25/israel-palestinians-hamas-war-netanyahu-pariah-sanctions-rights/93ce7ec8-9a2e-11f0-8ce3-5abc3053a693_story.html.

5. Laura Silver, "Most People Across 24 Surveyed Countries Have Negative Views of Israel and Netanyahu," *Pew Research Center*, June 3, 2025, https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2025/06/03/most-people-across-24-surveyed-countries-have-negative-views-of-israel-and-netanyahu/.

6. Laura Silver, "How Americans View Israel and the Israel-Hamas War at the Start of Trump's Second Term," *Pew Research Center*, April 8, 2025, https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2025/04/08/how-americans-view-israel-and-the-israel-hamas-war-at-the-start-of-trumps-second-term/.

7. David Gritten and Imogen Foulkes, "Israel Has Committed Genocide in Gaza, UN Commission of Inquiry Says," *BBC News*, September 16, 2025, https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c8641wv0n4go.

become a "super Sparta" – a permanently militarized garrison state, prepared to stand alone against the world.[8]

Public opinion surveys also reveal a sharp partisan divide in how Israel is perceived. In many countries, and especially in the U.S., liberals are more likely than conservatives to hold unfavorable views of Israel. For example, polls show that 69% of Democrats now view Israel unfavorably, compared with just 37% of Republicans.[9] Liberals tend to side with Palestinians as the "underdog," viewing the Israeli occupation through the lens of racism and settler-colonialism. Conservatives, by contrast, tend to be much more supportive of Israel. There are several reasons for this: conservatives are influenced by evangelical Christianity and view Israel in Messianic terms; they share affinity for Israel's nationalistic, militarized culture; they view Israel as a bulwark of Judeo-Christian civilization against so-called "Islamic terrorism"; and economically, they perceive Israel as a capitalist hub of technological innovation.[10] For these reasons, partisan identities have long shaped the American debate over Israel-Palestine.

However, generational change is evident among conservatives. Polls show that for Republicans under the age of 50, fully half now hold negative views of Israel.[11] A growing number of prominent conservatives – particularly those associated with the MAGA movement – have started to question unconditional support for Israel.[12] There are several examples of this trend. Candace Owens has forcefully declared "no government anywhere has a right to commit a genocide, ever. There is no justification for a genocide."[13] Similarly, Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-Ga.) has broken with GOP orthodoxy by calling for an end to U.S. military aid to Israel.[14] Other conservatives have challenged the influence of the Israel Lobby on American

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8. Tal Shalev, "Netanyahu Admits Israel Faces Prolonged 'Isolation' over War in Gaza," *CNN*, September 15, 2025, https://edition.cnn.com/2025/09/15/middleeast/netanyahu-israel-isolation-intl.

9. Silver, "How Americans View Israel and the Israel-Hamas War."

10. Danielle Kurtzleben, "This Is How the Republican Party Became So Strongly Pro-Israel," *NPR*, October 19, 2023, https://www.npr.org/2023/10/19/1206481356/republicans-israel-gop-middle-east-evangelicals-end-times-rapture-christians.

11. Silver, "How Americans View Israel and the Israel-Hamas War."

12. Aleks Phillips, "Israel Is Tearing MAGA Apart," *Newsweek*, November 17, 2023, https://www.newsweek.com/israel-tearing-maga-apart-candace-owens-ben-shapiro-1844740.

13. Rachel Dobkin, "Candace Owens' Opposition to Genocide Welcomed by Palestinian Supporters," *Newsweek*, November 4, 2023, https://www.newsweek.com/candace-owens-opposition-genocide-welcomed-palestinian-supporters-1840914.

14. Ross Williams, "Georgia's Marjorie Taylor Greene Labels Gaza Crisis a 'Genocide' in Break from GOP Colleagues," *Georgia Recorder*, July 30, 2025, https://georgiarecorder.com/20

politics. Tucker Carlson, in an interview with Senator Ted Cruz (R, Texas), asked bluntly, "I don't understand why we don't just be honest and say they're lobbying on behalf of a foreign government," when discussing AIPAC and U.S. policy toward Israel.[15]

Although conservatives as a whole remain largely pro-Israel, this dissent reveals a widening schism within the right. The divide reflects the deeper split between the neoconservative establishment and the insurgent MAGA movement. For the neoconservatives, Israel has long been the keystone of U.S. strategy in the Middle East – a permanent military base to guarantee American hegemony through endless war.[16] MAGA, by contrast, emerged in part as a working-class reaction against those wars. Research has found that counties that suffered U.S. combat deaths in Iraq were significantly more likely to vote for Trump in 2016, signaling a revolt against the costs of imperial overreach.[17]

This tension between the pro-war neoconservatives and the anti-interventionist impulses of MAGA is a welcome and long overdue development within the conservative movement. Yet this development must be approached with a note of caution. Conservative opposition to Israel rarely stems from a critique of capitalism and imperialism. As a result, a growing contingent of far-right social media influencers have seized upon outrage over Gaza to openly embrace anti-Semitism and promote neo-Nazi rhetoric.[18] Here lies both opportunity and danger: winning sections of the conservative rank-and-file away from reflexive support for Israel represents a significant advance, but absent a materialist, anti-imperialist analysis, there remains the risk that this energy could be redirected into anti-Semitic scapegoating. In this paper, I refer to this phenomenon as the *anti-Zionism of fools* – a new form of anti-Semitism that scapegoats "the Jews" for the crimes of U.S. and Israeli imperialism. The anti-Zionism of fools, despite being ostensibly anti-Zionist, mirrors the logic of

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25/07/30/georgias-marjorie-taylor-greene-labels-gaza-crisis-a-genocide-in-break-from-gop-colleagues/.

15. Hannah Feuer, "Why Isn't a Pro-Israel Lobbying Group Considered a Foreign Agent?" *Forward*, June 19, 2025, https://forward.com/news/730423/tucker-carlson-ted-cruz-aipac-foreign-agent/.

16. Adam L. Fuller, *Israel and the Neoconservatives: Zionism and American Interests* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2019).

17. Douglas L. Kriner and Francis X. Shen, "Battlefield Casualties and Ballot Box Defeat: Did the Bush-Obama Wars Cost Clinton the White House?" *SSRN Electronic Journal* (June 19, 2017), https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2989040.

18. Raheem Hosseini, "Neo-Nazis Are Exploiting the Israel-Hamas Conflict to Stoke Another Crisis: A 'Race War,' " *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 13, 2023, https://www.sfchronicle.com/us-world/article/nazi-antisemitism-israel-hamas-18476691.php.

Zionism, misidentifies the real enemy, and ultimately betrays the Palestinian struggle. This reality underscores the necessity of a consistent strategy by communists of transforming the growing conservative opposition toward Israel away from anti-Semitism and toward a principled hostility to imperialism.

Conservative "Anti-Zionism" and the Problem of Scapegoating

Marxists have long been both uncompromising opponents of anti-Semitism and consistent critics of Zionism as a false ideology rooted in imperialism. Lenin condemned Zionism as a bourgeois nationalist dogma, reactionary in form and socially retrogressive, while at the same time praising the progressive and enlightened elements of Jewish culture.[19] From a Marxist-Leninist perspective, Israel is not an independent force directing world affairs but a U.S. client-state, sustained by imperial capital and military power, and vulnerable only to class struggle. By contrast, the new wave of conservative opposition to Zionism fundamentally misidentifies the source of the problem. Its arguments fall into three main currents – theological, sociological, and countercultural – each of which misdirects anger onto Jews instead of the imperialist system that sustains Israel.

Some conservatives ground their opposition to Zionism in a strain of Christian theology that casts Judaism itself as the problem. Critics often seize on the biblical idea of Jews as the "chosen people," treating it as evidence that Judaism mandates supremacy or conquest. In fact, the concept of chosenness, rooted in passages from Genesis and Deuteronomy, refers to God's covenant with Abraham and the Israelites: a call to follow the 613 commandments (*mitzvot*) and serve as a "light unto the nations."[20] While Zionists have twisted this idea into a claim of racial superiority, that is hardly its only – or even primary – interpretation within Judaism. Many Jewish traditions emphasize religious plurality, teaching for example that God also established a covenant with all humanity through the Seven Laws of Noah, and that the righteous of every nation have a share in the World to Come.[21] Reducing Zionism to this

19. Enzo Traverso, *The Jewish Question: History of a Marxist Debate* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2019), 83.

20. Daniel H. Frank, ed., *A People Apart: Chosenness and Ritual in Jewish Philosophical Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993).

21. Jeffrey Spitzer, "The Noahide Laws," *My Jewish Learning*, n.d., https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/the-noahide-laws/.

one theological trope echoes the Islamophobic rhetoric after 9/11, when neoconservatives claimed that "terrorism" flowed directly from passages in the Qur'an rather than from geopolitical realities and imperialist interventions. In both cases, theology is blamed while the underlying material conditions and social relations are ignored.

A second conservative current casts Jews as a corrupting cabal undermining America from within. According to this narrative, the U.S. is a "Zionist Occupied Government," the Israel lobby controls Washington, and Jews wield disproportionate power over foreign policy.[22] Here, Israel is not seen as a tool of U.S. imperialism, but rather the U.S. is imagined as an innocent country manipulated into serving Jewish interests. This framing absolves American imperialism of responsibility, pretending that without Jewish influence, the U.S. would pursue a noble and benevolent foreign policy. It reduces the genocide in Gaza to the outcome of Jewish power rather than the structural dynamics of monopoly capitalism and American Empire. While it is fair to critique Zionist lobbying and influence, the sociological anti-Zionist view conflates lobbying with total control and attributes to "The Jews" a monolithic and conspiratorial agency.

A third current of conservative opposition to Zionism is found not in theology or sociology, but in the alt-right's countercultural posture.[23] This strand emerges primarily online, where right-wing influencers cultivate a self-image of being anti-establishment, transgressive, and willing to say the "unsayable." Angela Nagle, in her book *Kill All Normies*, has argued that the alt-right's growth in the age of social media was fueled by transgression against liberal taboos.[24] Having been raised in a political culture where the false accusations of anti-Semitism are used so indiscriminately that *any* criticism of Israeli policy is branded as Jew-hatred, many young conservatives reply by defiantly embracing overt anti-Semitism. In this atmosphere, scapegoating Jews is not the product of theological reflection or sociological analysis, but of a desire to shock, to provoke, and to "own the libs."

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22. Midwestern Marx, "On Israel-U.S. Relations," *YouTube Shorts video*, April 27, 2024, https://www.youtube.com/shorts/j8nB37ZaUkY.

23. Ross Douthat, "The New Culture of the Right: Vital, Masculine and Intentionally Offensive," *New York Times*, May 1, 2025, https://www.nytimes.com/2025/05/01/opinion/right-wing-masculinity-culture.html.

24. Angela Nagle, *Kill All Normies: Online Culture Wars from 4Chan and Tumblr to Trump and the Alt-Right* (Winchester, UK: Zer0 Books, 2017).

Figures like former mixed martial artist Jake Shields exemplify this trend.[25] On podcasts and social media, Shields has denied the Holocaust, claimed that the Nazis were not racist, and has argued that Hiltler was just "trying to get peace deals."[26] For Shields and others like him, anti-Zionism becomes indistinguishable from neo-Nazism, wrapped in a veneer of countercultural rebellion. But from a Marxist perspective, neo-Nazism is not radical at all. It is a false rebellion that reinforces the very system it claims to oppose. The Nazis were not outsiders or rebels, but brutal defenders of the status quo of monopoly capitalism. Thus, what passes today as "countercultural" anti-Zionism is in reality an intellectually bankrupt and politically dangerous ideology that diverts energy away from a principled class struggle.

Zionists and Their Mirror-Image Opponents

The conservative critiques outlined above represent a modern incarnation of what the 19th-century socialist August Bebel called the "socialism of fools."[27] Bebel warned that scapegoating Jews for the crimes of capitalism was a diversion that left the real culprits untouched. Today, the same logic applies: blaming Jews for the crimes of Zionism is nothing more than the anti-Zionism of fools. It misidentifies the enemy and transforms opposition to Israel into a form of anti-Semitism.

The deep irony is that the anti-Zionism of fools actually reproduces the central ideological claims of Zionism itself. Zionists have long argued that Judaism and Zionism are one and the same – that the modern State of Israel represents the collective will and identity of the entire Jewish people. Zionist mythology presents Israel not as a 19th-century colonial project, but as the timeless fulfillment of a two-thousand-year longing in the Jewish soul for return and redemption. For instance, Zionists often invoke the Passover Seder's closing line, "*Next year in Jerusalem*," to suggest that Zionism is nothing more than the

25. Jeff Tischauser and Rachael Fugardi, "Podcast Platforms Host Jake Shields' Antisemitism, Bigotry and Racism," *Southern Poverty Law Center*, April 11, 2025, https://www.splcenter.org/resources/hatewatch/podcast-platforms-host-jake-shields-bigotry/.

26. Angry White Men, "Jake Shields: Adolf Hitler 'Wasn't Pushing Hatred Towards Other Races,' " *Anarchist Federation*, March 11, 2025, https://www.anarchistfederation.net/jake-shields-adolf-hitler-wasnt-pushing-hatred-towards-other-races/#/.

27. Michael Lerner, *The Socialism of Fools: Anti-Semitism on the Left* (Oakland: Institute for Labor & Mental Health, 1992).

natural expression of an unbroken Jewish yearning for homeland.[28] Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu once declared himself to be the "representative of the entire Jewish people."[29] In addition, Israel's 2018 Nation-State Bill explicitly defines Israel as "the nation-state of the Jewish people, and the Jewish people alone."[30] And beyond law and rhetoric, the Israeli state devotes immense resources to archaeological digs, museums, and pilgrimages to ancient sites – all designed to present Jewish antiquity in the land as direct proof of Zionism's legitimacy.[31]

The anti-Zionism of fools mirrors this logic. Where Zionists conflate Judaism with Israel in order to sanctify the state, the anti-Zionist critics conflate Judaism with Israel in order to condemn it. Both positions reproduce the ideological framework that Zionism itself depends upon. The only difference lies in moral judgment: for Zionists, the conflation justifies Israel; for their anti-Zionist opponents, it condemns the Jews. In either case, the effect is to strengthen Zionist ideology rather than disrupt it. An anti-Zionism that scapegoats Jews does not challenge the ideological core of Zionism, but reinforces it. In this sense, the anti-Zionists of fools are nothing more than *Zionists in reverse* – they operate as Zionism's distorted mirror image.

Historical Refutation: Why Judaism is not Zionism

For nearly two millennia after the destruction of the Second Temple and the suppression of the Bar Kochba revolt in 135 CE, Jews lived dispersed throughout the world and Palestine fell under the providence of successive empires – Roman, Byzantine, Ottoman, and others. This period saw the rise of rabbinic Judaism, which shifted the center of Jewish life away from the temple, its rituals, and political sovereignty, toward Torah study, prayer, and halakhic

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28. Louis Keene, "Is the Passover Seder Zionist? Behind This Annual Debate Is a Deeper Tension at the Heart of Judaism," *Forward*, April 11, 2025, https://forward.com/fast-forward/711655/is-the-passover-seder-zionist/.

29. Anshel Pfeffer, "Netanyahu Speaks for All Jews Whether They Like It or Not," *Haaretz*, February 12, 2015, https://www.haaretz.com/2015-02-12/ty-article/.premium/netanyahu-speaks-for-all-jews/0000017f-db84-db22-a17f-ffb5ec230000.

30. Miriam Berger, "Israel's Hugely Controversial 'Nation-State' Law, Explained," *Vox*, July 31, 2018, https://www.vox.com/world/2018/7/31/17623978/israel-jewish-nation-state-law-bill-explained-apartheid-netanyahu-democracy.

31. Dikla Taylor-Sheinman, " 'It Comes with the Territory': How Israel's Archaeologists Legitimize Annexation," *+972 Magazine*, July 1, 2025, https://www.972mag.com/israel-archaeology-annexation-rafi-greenberg/.

observance in Diaspora communities.[32] It was during this time that Jews considered themselves to be living in exile ("*galut*") and longed for restoration of the Temple. Yet this longing was an eschatological and spiritual hope, not a concrete political call for statehood.[33] Mohandas Gandhi captured this spiritual distinction when he wrote, "the Palestine of the Biblical conception is not a geographical tract. It is in their hearts."[34] If Zionism were simply a natural outgrowth of Judaism, one would expect to find numerous examples over the centuries of Jewish movements rising up to reclaim sovereignty in Palestine, yet such projects do not appear until the late 19th century with the rise of European nationalism.

A further refutation of the claim that Zionism was a natural expression of Jewish longing can be found in the history of its Christian antecedents. A robust Christian discourse of Jewish "restoration" to Palestine existed centuries before Herzl convened the First Zionist Congress. Among Calvinists and Puritans there emerged a movement known as "Restorationism," which held that the return of the Jews to Palestine was a necessary precondition for the Second Coming of Christ.[35] Restorationists sought to remove Jews from Europe, where they were viewed as a theological and cultural irritant, and relocate them to the Levant to fulfill a Christian prophecy. In England, figures such as Thomas Brightman – a Puritan theologian who argued that Jews must be "restored" to Palestine – helped popularize this vision.[36] If Zionism were simply the outgrowth of Judaism, how do we explain the fact that it was Christians, not Jews, who articulated the earliest calls for a Jewish return to Palestine?

It was not until the late nineteenth century that Zionism emerged as a political movement within the Jewish community, marked by the publication of Theodor Herzl's *The Jewish State* in 1896. Herzl wrote at a moment of sharpening contradictions in European society. Jewish communities were being emancipated from feudal restrictions, yet they continued to face virulent anti-Semitism and exclusion from full integration into European civic life.

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32. Michael Tuval, "Judaism Transforms in the Diaspora During the Second Temple Period," *TheTorah.com*, August 12, 2024, https://www.thetorah.com/article/judaism-transforms-in-the-diaspora-during-the-second-temple-period.

33. Shaul Magid, *The Necessity of Exile: Essays from a Distance* (Kingston, N.Y.: Ayin Press, 2023).

34. "Gandhi, the Jews & Zionism," *Jewish Virtual Library*, n.d., https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/lsquo-the-jews-rsquo-by-gandhi.

35. Barbara W. Tuchman, *Bible and Sword: England and Palestine from the Bronze Age to Balfour* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1956).

36. Donald M. Lewis, *The Origins of Christian Zionism: Lord Shaftesbury and Evangelical Support for a Jewish Homeland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 27.

Historian Shlomo Avineri has described Herzl's pamphlet as a "revolution" in Jewish life, transforming what he called the "nebulous and tenuous" messianic longing for redemption from exile into a concrete nationalist project for the construction of a secular state.[37] Herzl is today memorialized as a visionary of the Jewish people. Yet his movement's relationship to Judaism itself was profoundly fraught, for four major reasons.

First, Herzl and the other early Zionists were not steeped in Jewish religious learning but in the culture of the European intelligentsia. Herzl himself had little knowledge of Jewish ritual. When he visited synagogues to garner support, contemporaries reported he needed coaching to recite even the simplest Hebrew prayers.[38] The early Zionist thinkers and the founders of the State of Israel were resolutely secularists who were products of European culture, not religious Judaism.[39] Thus, Zionism was not born of Jewish tradition but modeled on the rising tide of European nationalist movements.

Second, the early Zionists were not only secular but often deeply hostile toward traditional Jews, especially those of Eastern Europe. Herzl's private diaries bristle with disdain for his fellow Jews. He expressed particular contempt for those who spoke German with a Yiddish accent.[40] He appealed to the wealthy, assimilated Jewish elites in Western Europe by presenting Zionism as a way to rid themselves of the "disquieting, incalculable, and unavoidable rivalry of a Jewish proletariat."[41] Max Nordau, Herzl's close collaborator and co-founder of the World Zionist Organization, gave the infamous call for the creation of a "muscular Judaism," a new physically strong type of Jew to replace the supposedly weak and degenerate Torah student hunched over books.[42] Early Zionism thus carried within it not pride in Jewish culture, but contempt for it.

Third, Herzl and other Zionists openly sought collaboration with anti-Semites as allies in the project of a Jewish state. In a diary entry dated June 12, 1895,

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37. Shlomo Avineri, *The Making of Modern Zionism: The Intellectual Origins of the Jewish State* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 47.

38. Alan T. Levenson, *An Introduction to Modern Jewish Thinkers: From Spinoza to Soloveitchik*, 2nd ed. (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 108.

39. Donald M. Lewis, *A Short History of Christian Zionism: From the Reformation to the Twenty-First Century* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2021), 12.

40. Theodor Herzl, "Mauschel," in *Zionist Writings: Essays and Addresses*, vol. 1, ed. Harry Zohn (New York: Herzl Press, 1973), 163–68.

41. Theodor Herzl, *The Jewish State* (1896; repr., Hofenberg, 2015), 10.

42. Moshe Zimmermann, "Muscle Jews versus Nervous Jews," in *Emancipation through Muscles: Jews and Sports in Europe*, ed. Michael Brenner and Gideon Reuveni (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 13.

Herzl wrote, "the anti-Semites will become our most dependable friends, the anti-Semitic countries our allies."[43] His logic was clear: both Zionists and anti-Semites shared a desire to see Jews leave Europe. Pogroms and persecution could thus serve as a perverse "push factor" to drive Jews to Palestine. This logic led Herzl in 1903 to meet with Vyacheslav von Plehve, the Russian Interior Minister notorious for overseeing pogroms. Herzl offered a bargain: Russian support for Jewish emigration to Palestine in exchange for Zionist suppression of Jewish revolutionary movements within Russia.[44] The willingness of Zionists to make common cause with anti-Semitic regimes reached its nadir in the 1933 Haavara (Transfer) Agreement, in which Nazi Germany and the Jewish Agency cooperated to transfer some 60,000 German Jews to Palestine – while the Nazi state simultaneously barred emigration elsewhere and confiscated Jewish property.[45]

Fourth, Zionism was deeply unpopular among Jews themselves until well after the Holocaust. Religious authorities of every major denomination opposed Zionism as heretical. Orthodox rabbis upheld the Talmudic prohibition against Jews ascending to the Land of Israel "as a wall" – en masse – before the coming of the Messiah.[46] They condemned the Zionist revival of Hebrew as a profanation of a sacred language reserved for prayer and ritual. Reform Judaism, founded in the nineteenth century as a progressive movement emphasizing universal ethical values, likewise rejected Zionism. At the dedication of Charleston's Beth Elohim synagogue in 1841, Rabbi Gustavus Poznanski declared, "this synagogue is our temple, this city our Jerusalem, this happy land our Palestine."[47] The Reform movement codified this stance in the 1885 Pittsburgh Platform, writing, "we consider ourselves no longer a nation, but a religious community, and therefore expect neither a return to Palestine, nor sacrificial worship under the sons of Aaron, nor the restoration of any of the laws concerning the Jewish state."[48]

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43. Theodor Herzl, *Diaries*, June 12, 1895 entry, in *The Complete Diaries of Theodor Herzl*, ed. Raphael Patai (New York: Herzl Press, 1960).

44. Yosef Gorny, *Zionism and the Arabs, 1882–1948: A Study of Ideology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 48–52.

45. Edwin Black, *The Transfer Agreement: The Dramatic Story of the Pact Between the Third Reich and Jewish Palestine* (Washington, D.C.: Dialog Press, 1984).

46. Lewis, *A Short History of Christian Zionism*, 9.

47. Michael A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1995), 233–34.

48. Meyer, *Response to Modernity*, 387-388.

Only after the Holocaust and the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 did Zionism gain broad acceptance among Jews worldwide. Historian Donald M. Lewis has described this as "the greatest U-turn in the history of Judaism."[49] The devastation of European Jewry, combined with the rise of the United States as global hegemon, enabled Zionism to become the dominant ideology in Jewish institutions. Israel was embraced not because Zionism had always been inherent to Judaism, but because U.S. imperial strategy made Israel a linchpin in the Middle East: a client-state to secure oil reserves, suppress Arab nationalism, and counter Soviet influence. American officials occasionally state this plainly. As Robert F. Kennedy Jr. bluntly admitted in a recent interview, "Israel is a bulwark for us. It's almost like having an aircraft carrier in the Middle East. If Israel disappears, Russia, China, and BRICS countries will control 90% of the oil in the world and that would be cataclysmic for U.S. national security."[50]

Toward a Materialist Analysis of Zionism

A Marxist-Leninist analysis of Zionism begins from the standpoint of historical-materialism: the conviction that the driving forces behind Zionism are not to be found in theology, spiritual belief, or abstract doctrine, but in the concrete conditions that produce human life itself. Although Karl Marx did not directly comment on Zionism, his early writings laid the foundation for a materialist approach to the topic with his famous 1843 essay *On the Jewish Question.* There he dismissed attempts to explain Jewish history through the study of theology alone, insisting instead, "let us not look for the secret of the Jew in his religion, but let us look for the secret of his religion in the real Jew." Marx demanded that we examine "the actual, worldly Jew – not the Sabbath Jew, but the everyday Jew."[51] In other words, the explanation for Jewish survival and persecution lay not in the realm of abstract religious ideas but in the material social roles Jews occupied in a given mode of production.

This insight was deepened in the 1940s by Abram Leon, who expanded upon Marx's analysis in his classic work *The Jewish Question: A Marxist Interpretation*, which analyzed the history of the Jews based on their economic

49. Lewis, *A Short History of Christian Zionism*, 12.

50. Dáire Cumiskey, "Is Israel the Loyal Watchdog of US Imperialism?" *Socialist Worker* (November 12, 2023): https://socialistworker.co.uk/in-depth/is-israel-the-loyal-watchdog-of-us-imperialism/

51. Karl Marx, "On the Jewish Question," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd ed., ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton, 1978), 48.

and sole role. "Above all," Leon argued, "the Jews constitute historically a social group with a specific economic function. They are a class, or more precisely, a people-class."[52] Excluded from landholding and barred from entering most guilds, Jews in feudal Europe were confined to roles in commerce, money-lending, and trade. Their distinct religious, linguistic, and cultural traits were preserved not by some metaphysical essence, but because they were bound together in a social position that reproduced itself across generations. Anti-Semitism in feudal Europe, therefore, did not originate in religious hatred alone. It was rooted in the material antagonism between peasants and moneylenders – with Jewish traders acting as intermediaries for the landed aristocracy.[53] Anti-Jewish violence was thus a "safety valve" that redirected peasant anger away from feudal lords and toward a scapegoated minority.

Following Marx and Leon, a materialist analysis of Zionism looks beyond biblical imagery or religious longing and instead explores the movement's concrete social functions. Far from being an organic outgrowth of Judaism, Zionism emerged in the age of European nationalism and has been sustained only because it serves the needs of imperialism. The central significance of Palestine lies not in its sanctity as a "Holy Land" but in its geographic location as a strategic land bridge at the hinge of Africa, Asia, and Europe. Since antiquity, Palestine has been contested by various empires precisely because control of the Levant offers command of Mediterranean ports and overland trade routes.[54] For modern imperialism, Palestine provides a forward military outpost guarding the Suez Canal, the Gulf, and the broader Middle East.

Zionism emerged at this strategic chokepoint as a way to resolve European contradictions outward. Faced with virulent anti-Semitism, capitalist crisis, and rising revolutionary movements, European elites could export Jews to Palestine rather than confront anti-Semitism at home. The religious-symbolic language of "return to the Promised Land" provided an ideological veil for the Zionist project, mobilizing biblical imagery to legitimize imperial expansion. In this sense, Zionism functions today much as Christianity did during the Crusades – cloaking material conquest in superstructural religious language.

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52. Abram Leon, *The Jewish Question: A Marxist Interpretation* (1946; repr., Atlanta: Pathfinder Press, 2020), 57.

53. Lerner, *The Socialism of Fools*, 13-14.

54. Ilan Pappé, *The Modern Middle East: A Social and Cultural History* (London: Routledge, 2005).

Just as Jews once functioned as a people-class within feudalism, the Zionist state functions today as a people-class writ large – a political formation binding Jewish survival and identity to the needs of Western capital. Israel has become the "special instrument" of monopoly capitalism, an advanced garrison state subsidized by the U.S. and armed to serve as a regional enforcer.[55] In return, Jews in the Diaspora are ideologically tied to Zionism, encouraged to see their own survival as dependent upon the maintenance of this imperial outpost. The result is a tragic inversion: a social group once scapegoated as pawns of feudal lords are now mobilized as tools of imperial power. A materialist analysis thus reveals that Zionism is not a religious destiny within Judaism, but rather a specific social function of monopoly capitalism.

Conclusion

The argument advanced in this essay can be stated simply: the growing global opposition to Israel sparked by the genocide in Gaza is a crucial advancement in the fight to liberate Palestine, especially given the breakdown of the longstanding conservative support for Israel. However, without a proper materialist analysis of the role Zionism plays in imperialism, opposition to Israel risks turning into Zionism in reverse: a distorted mirror image of Zionist ideology itself. I call this phenomenon the anti-Zionism of fools – a false ideology that scapegoates Jews and Judaism for the crimes of Zionism and imperialism, which ultimately strengthens the very system it claims to oppose.

The real enemy is not Jews as a social group, nor Judaism as a religion, but Western imperialism, which upholds Israel as a vassal regime that helps secure U.S. hegemony in the Middle East. Israel's crimes against the Palestinian people are inseparable from the broader logic of American Empire: the drive to control resources, trade routes, and strategic chokepoints, and to suppress any force that resists imperial domination. The scapegoating of Jews diverts us from a proper understanding of the problem.

The task for communists is therefore clear. We must expose and combat the anti-Zionism of fools wherever it appears, whether on the right or the left. We must build an anti-imperialist movement that rejects scapegoating and instead unites the American working-class across borders against its common enemy.

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55. Tony Cliff, "Zionism and the Israeli State," in *Class Struggle and the State* (London: Bookmarks, 1988), 118.

Only a broad anti-imperialist movement – rooted in Marxism-Leninism – can dismantle Zionism, defeat imperialism, and open the road to liberation for the Palestinian people.

2

Between Lenin and Zapata: The Double Soul of the Mexican Left[1]

Jaime Ortega Reyna[2]

1. This article is an English translation of its original, which appeared in the journal *Nuestra Historia* in 2024.

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> *"The freedom that, at last, has force at its service, instead of being trampled by it. The freedom to break all chains and establish a world without exploitation: this is how Lenin conceived of freedom."*

—Wenceslao Roces

Introduction: Lenin in Iztapalapa

Located in the so-called "Peripheric Ring" of the eastern zone of Mexico City, in the populous borough of Iztapalapa—with nearly 2 million inhabitants, the most populated of the megalopolis—there stands out a set of buildings constructed under the protection of the so-called "urban-popular movement" that emerged in the late 1980s. Under the initials of the once powerful "Francisco Villa Popular Front," this sector managed to secure housing for groups mobilized at the dawn of neoliberalism.

These particular buildings, uniformly built with brown brick, stand out from others for one reason: on their large walls appear vast silhouettes that were pre-designed at the time of construction, integrated into the black brick walls that form the outlines and features. Thus, on the walls one can see up close or from afar the images of Emperor Cuauhtémoc, the revolutionary agrarian Emiliano Zapata, the military leader Francisco Villa among the national figures, and among the foreigners a young and stern Mao Tse-Tung, a smiling "Che" Guevara, and, of course, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, who is portrayed in profile, with a broad beard.

The figure of Lenin has had an ambivalent situation in its reception in Mexico. This is due to the very form of configuration of political culture which, as will be seen, was marked by sympathizing with the efforts for change in Russia, but at the same time had to distance itself from them in shaping its own trajectory of political change.

The revolutions in Russia and in Mexico were contemporaneous, but they demonstrated the diversity in how political directions and subaltern classes

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groups on Marxist theory and history. He is also co-editor of the bulletin *El ejercicio del pensar*. Between 2022 and 2024, he coordinated and participated in CONAHCYT-sponsored research projects on post-neoliberal transformation and food sustainability, and he is part of UAM's Inter-Institutional Network for Strengthening the Social and Solidarity Economy.

could express themselves. They shaped the double soul of the Left, which had to advance with both traditions and heritages, projecting its own political space.

Of course, the ties tended to persist as they coexisted over time. That is the objective of the first section. Later, it was the Mexican Communist Party (PCM) that became the principal recipient of Lenin's work. Although not in an extensive manner, we will show some of those paths crossed by Mexican communism, which will be the objective of the second section.

The following section will sketch how Marxist thought—in its theoretical diversity—appropriated the work of the revolutionary in order to pose its own problems. Finally, the cultural dimension allowed for the appearance of Lenin in different spaces, through differentiated yet enduring artistic manifestations over time.

The framework we wish to reconstruct seeks to emphasize the universality of Lenin, in his constant presence and, at the same time, the way in which the Mexican Left negotiated with that spirit. Unlike other experiences, the Mexican one has as its distinctive feature the existence of a great revolutionary movement, with popular leaderships of great depth, which rival Lenin's capacity for mobilization. Its main difference, however, is that the latter managed to build a long-standing political and social power.

The Mexican Left had to make Lenin and Zapata coexist in its symbolic universe, showing that it was rooted in national history, but that it did not remain confined within it; rather, it broadened its horizons toward the great events of the world.

Mexico and Lenin; Lenin and Mexico

The name of V. I. Lenin leapt onto the world stage in the course of 1917, when Russia was undergoing a turbulent transition from the tsarist regime to a democratic one and later to a socialist one. Meanwhile, in Mexico the situation tended toward the gradual pacification of the social forces that had unleashed an intense civil war, once the more conservative faction had triumphed over the most radical peasant armies of the north (with Villa at the head) and the south (with Zapata as its symbol).

The so-called "Mexican Revolution," in its armed phase, had concluded by 1915–1916, and the following year was marked by the establishment of the

foundations for a new state through the drafting of a somewhat constitutional pact, into which the popular struggles of the previous five years were inscribed. Although 1917 was a highly significant year for both Mexico and Russia, political temporality advanced along very different paths: in the former, the most intense phase of internal conflict was ending, while in the latter, it was only just beginning a little later.

It is well known that Lenin did not have a special interest in the Latin American region. Except for the case of Argentina—briefly explored in the development of his arguments on imperialism—the rest of the political processes and nations were absent from his reflection. Despite this, within the Mexican leftist tradition it is well known that Emiliano Zapata—an emblematic figure of the peasants of southern Mexico—addressed a message to Lenin, in which, among other things, he said:

> *"We would gain much, humanity and justice would gain much, if all the peoples of America and all the nations of old Europe understood that the cause of Revolutionary Mexico and the cause of Russia are and represent the cause of humanity, the supreme interest of all oppressed peoples."*[3]

The internationalist effort of the Mexican Revolution was not unusual. First, because a fundamental branch of the root of the revolutionary tree had found in anarchists a crucial knot. The anarchism of the early 20th century carried an internationalist spirit to overcome any dimension marked by borders.

Coming from 19th-century Mexican radical liberalism, the anarchists who participated—above all as "ideologues"—in the Mexican Revolution had a clear understanding of the Russian source of the slogan "land and liberty", which they themselves had made their own. In the case of Zapata's Ejército Libertador del Sur (Liberation Army of the South), there was also a revolutionary coincidence in the slogan "land and liberty."

Thus, even if there was no precise clarity on Lenin's formulation regarding the agrarian question—that is, on his dispute-alliance with the "social-revolutionary" sectors, heirs of the populists—it was nevertheless intuited, from a distance, how important the agrarian question was in the

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3. "Zapata y Flores Magón Saludaron la Revolución Social," *La Voz de México*, no. 1666 (November 12, 1958).

Bolshevik government. Anarchist culture, which was present in the peasant insurgency, contributed to viewing with favor the localized experiences in other geographies.

Thus, Zapata was not the only one among the revolutionaries who grasped this significant Russian experience. As we have mentioned, the anarchists of the Mexican Liberal Party, settled in California—where they were relentlessly persecuted by the U.S. government—also expressed brief gestures of sympathy:

> *"Nicolai Lenin, the Russian leader, is at this moment the revolutionary figure who shines the brightest amid the chaos of existing conditions throughout the world, because he stands at the head of a movement that must provoke, whether or not those ingrained in the current system of exploitation and crime like it, the great world revolution that is already knocking at the doors of all peoples; the great world revolution that will bring about profoundly important changes in the way human beings live together."*[4]

Ricardo Flores Magón, the principal editor of the newspaper Regeneración in this final stage of anarchism tied to the Mexican Revolution, was the one who wrote these words, followed by the commentary on some excerpts from a speech by the leader of the Russian Revolution. The Oaxacan concluded by writing:

> *"How inspiring are Lenin's words. No longer is universal fraternity merely a desire felt only by a few emancipated from prejudices and errors of all kinds. This desire is penetrating to the very marrow of the peoples; this desire is becoming flesh and blood."*[5]

Zapata, who when he addressed Lenin was already in a clear position of minority and retreat, was assassinated in April 1919, bringing to a close an important cycle of Mexican agrarian radicalism. Flores Magón and the core of the anarchists of the Mexican Liberal Party, persecuted and imprisoned, accompanied from afar the Russian anarchists whom they supported in their

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4. *"La revolución rusa," Regeneración*, no. 262, Época IV (March 16, 1918).
5. Ibid.

struggle against the Bolsheviks, eventually going so far as to denounce the Soviet government as just another tyranny.

The chapter of Lenin's connection with the Mexican Revolution still had another episode, though reconstructed out of his absences. This concerned the presence of Lenin in the lands of southeastern Mexico, which had been far removed from the armed conflict. The Mexican revolutionary process took shape in the form of local exercises in radicalism, led by social leaders—called caudillos—who, in some cases, became governmental managers, whose incendiary discourse and proclamations of revolution coincided with the atmosphere of reference to the Russian situation.

Thus, in the southern state of Tabasco, the radical governor Tomás Garrido Canabal fostered the organization of youth groups known as the "Red Shirts," who launched themselves against the clergy and in favor of rationalist education. On the ruins of destroyed churches, schools were founded, many bearing the names of Marx, Lenin, and even Stalin; and when the Congress of Socialist Students took place in Villahermosa, the capital of Tabasco, the Internationale was sung and shouts of "Long live Lenin!" were raised.

In addition to the symbolic acts of radicalism—mediated by the pursuit of power—during his various governments (a period of his life portrayed in Graham Greene's novel *The Power and the Glory*), Garrido Canabal even named his daughter Liberty and his son Lenin.

However, the most significant case is that of Felipe Carrillo Puerto, governor of Yucatán during the years 1921–1924, also known as the "Distinguished Benefactor of the Proletariat." Carrillo Puerto had sympathized with the Russian Revolution; the situation, tending toward achieving reforms, placed him at the head of the Socialist Party of the Southeast. During his government, he promoted profound transformations in line with the revolutionary spirit: women's suffrage, the promotion of the rights of the Mayan indigenous population, agrarian reform that brought him into conflict with powerful interests tied to the export of henequen, among others

Although Carrillo Puerto was not a great ideologue and was far from being a Marxist, he understood the radicalism of the Russian event. He wrote to José Ingenieros:

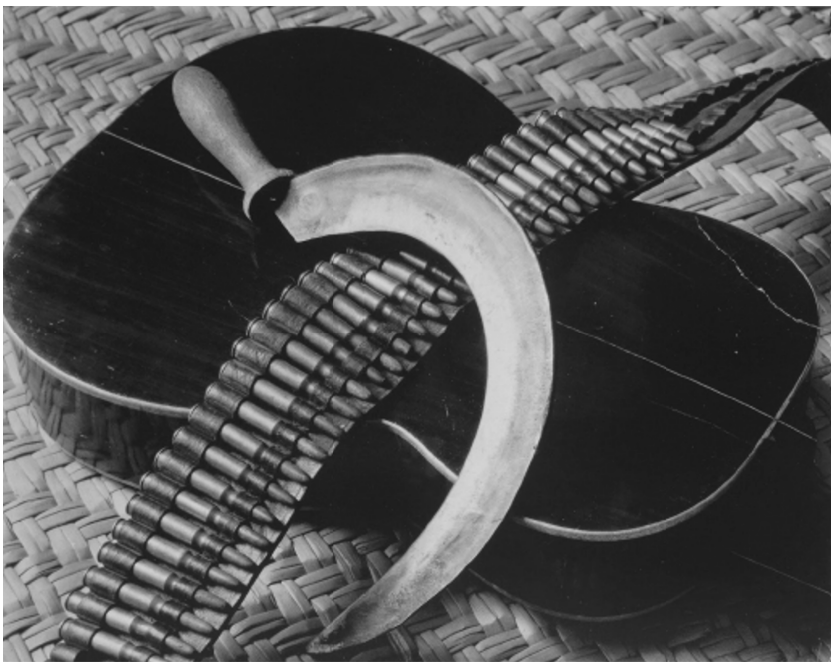

Figure 1: Figure 1: Guitar, bandolier, and sickle (Photo: Tina Modotti, source: Museo Nacional de Arte, INBA).

> *"The newspapers that compose what you have rigorously called the Capitalist International of the Press attack me continuously, calling me Bolshevik and other things. Bolshevik I am because I detest the capitalist regime founded on the impiety of the strong and the exploitation of the humble. I want something very different from that regime, what we revolutionaries of all countries seek: greater freedom, more justice."*

Ingenieros would later recall that relationship with Carrillo Puerto[6], who was assassinated by the agro-exporting oligarchy tied to henequen production in January 1924—just weeks before Lenin's death—and who became an icon of the radicalism of the 1920s. One anecdote may provide greater clarity. In the mid-1960s, the Soviet correspondent in Mexico from the TASS news agency visited the family of the "Distinguished Benefactor of the Proletariat," and was informed of a letter that Lenin had sent to Carrillo Puerto in gratitude for the material aid he had sent to Russia.

Moved, he asked to see the letter, and the family immediately undertook a search for the missive, only to realize that it had disappeared, most likely taken

6. "Una carta de José Ingenieros. Carrillo Puerto, amigo de la Revolución rusa," *El Machete*, no. 508 (January 1938).

by a North American student who, months earlier, had requested access to Carrillo Puerto's preserved documents. The journalist was deeply struck by this news and decided to recount it as yet another sign of unity among peoples, despite its absence.[7]

The Mexican Revolution opened channels of expression with Russia after Lenin's death. Famous is the arrival in Mexico of the first female diplomat, Alexandra Kollontai, whose appointment seemed to signal the founding of a new bond. Although not very successful in her mission, years would pass until the time of the war, which would once again bring the two revolutions closer. Just as in 1917, during the period of 1934–1940 both nations experienced a second moment of great transformation; in the Soviet Union under the modernizing mantle of Joseph Stalin, and in Mexico under the leadership of Lázaro Cárdenas.

By the end of that decade, pressured by the crisis and the threat of war, both nations were compelled to march forward and radicalize—through contradictory and even contested paths—the mechanisms of articulation of society, allowing them to share a common commitment to state direction. It is no coincidence that at that time the Ministry of Public Education published a brief biographical sketch of Lenin written by the Marxist historian José Mancisidor[8], which was distributed among thousands of rural teachers—who were then mostly normalistas. The author, close at the time to the PCM, also offered a historical interpretation in a national-popular key and, moreover, was recognized for having traveled to the Soviet Union.

This period once again brought the two revolutions closer on the international stage. Mexico and the Soviet Union found themselves united once more in the denunciation of the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, in their support for the Spanish Republic, in the reception of refugees when it fell. They only showed some distance when the USSR invaded Poland, which Mexico condemned. The onset of the war allowed for the reestablishment of relations.

Two figures once again helped connect the two revolutions, amid the realm of international conflict. Ambassador Constantin Oumansky became a very popular figure in Mexico, and his death would be deeply mourned by the Mexican political class, which dedicated lavish tributes to him as a sign of

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7. Anatoli Pavlenko, *"En busca de la carta perdida de Lenin," Siglo Veinte* 31 (1965): 33, 40.

8. José Mancisidor, *Lenin* (México City: Secretaría de Educación Pública, Biblioteca del obrero y el campesino, 1936).

mutual understanding, setting him apart from "Nazi-fascist" rhetoric. On the Soviet side, Ambassador Narces Bassols García presented Mexico's highest honor, the Order of the Aztec Eagle, to Alexandra Kollontai.

Although both representatives carried out brief diplomatic assignments, their presence and reception served as gestures reaffirming a certain kinship between revolutionary processes.

The idyll between Zapata's homeland and Lenin's was intense but short-lived. Once the war had ended, Mexico changed course and attempted an approach with the United States, placing itself within the Cold War orbit that was adverse to socialism. Among the descendants of Mexican radical agrarianism, even at that time, there was a broad process of reception of Lenin's ideas.

A good example of this is the journal México Agrario, which during the 1940s compiled the ideas of agrarian intellectuals—whether engineers, educators, or historians—who built the institutions of post-revolutionary Mexico. An issue from 1945, for instance, presents numerous articles by Soviet researchers under titles such as Lenin as Organizer of the Working Class; Lenin and the Peasants; Lenin and the Red Army; Lenin, Stalin, and Science; and The Ulyanov Family.[9]

Mexican Communism, between Zapata and Lenin

In 1919, a few months after the founding of the Communist International, the Mexican Communist Party was formed, its history extending until 1981, the year in which it merged with other organizations. The PCM lived an agitated life, between political irrelevance and being the vanguard of social movements. One fact marked its existence from beginning to end: the presence of the Mexican Revolution as a founding act of the Mexican state.

How could the communists set out to proclaim a social revolution if one had already occurred? The Mexican Revolution became the ideological marker that provided identity to Mexican communism.

That is why, throughout their entire history, the communists had to live in tension with the possibility of a narrative that recognized the people as the main actor. Thus, this ambiguity was reflected in a reinterpretation of the great

9. México Agrario. *Revista sociológica* 1 (January–March 1945), vol. VII.

figures of nation-building. In the 1920s, the communists turned above all to Ricardo Flores Magón, Felipe Carrillo Puerto, and, especially, Emiliano Zapata, as the architects of the revolutionary struggle of which they were heirs.

In the 1930s they declared themselves to be children of the Mexican land and extended their genealogy to include as references the priests Miguel Hidalgo and José María Morelos as the great initiators of independence and of the first agrarian socialism; Benito Juárez and Ignacio Zaragoza as fighters against imperialism (before the French Empire); and, once again, Emiliano Zapata.

This entire reading of local history gave communists a double sense of belonging. On the one hand, they were part of a great world movement, whose main leader was always Lenin; on the other, they recognized that socialism was not an entirely imported or foreign idea, but one that arose from the profound Mexican reality.

This dual dimension has not yet been fully appreciated in all its potential. From 1936 until the mid-1960s, national figures coexisted with Marx and, above all, with Lenin.

Lenin's figure occupied many front pages and numerous texts in the press. But in addition, within a tradition inherited from the armed phase of the revolution, corridos (popular ballads) were composed, dedicated to Lenin or in which he appeared, almost all of them published in El Machete.

Graciela Amador, a communist leader in the 1920s, composed the "Corrida of November 7" where she wrote:

> *"Then the Red Torch shone for them,*
> *for the rebellious cry was heard,*
> *of the great Nicolás Lenin."*[10]

She also composed the corrido titled "Lenin," in which she called him "the Redeemer of the world," adding:

10. Graciela Amador, "Corrido del 7 de noviembre," in *El Gran Octubre y los mexicanos* (Mexico: n.p., 1987), 132.

"He breathed his last breath on January 24 (from January 22),[11] *and even more so, the example of that people*
where Lenin taught his lessons
goes on guiding men
with his luminous star."

Thus, she concluded:

"Thus, across the entire globe,
from one end to the other,
the workers follow / the word of Lenin."[12]

Another composer of the era wrote "Unificación," where it says:

"Never forget that Zapata,
comrade of the mine,
for triumph to be achieved
what he lacked was 'flour.'
Let us take an example
to reach a good end,
Let us follow Russia's lead
and Comrade Lenin."[13]

Other songs, such as that of Marco Monero, say: "Onward! / The day / part of a May Day / toward a November 7 / multiplied / by Lenin's command / and R. F. Montenegro seals the unification of both revolutions":

"Long live Land and Liberty!
Wave, scarlet flag,
Cradled by the breeze,

11. G. Amador, "Lenin," in *El Gran Octubre y los mexicanos*, 135.
12. G. Amador, "Lenin," in *El Gran Octubre y los mexicanos*, 136.
13. Héctor Martínez, "Unificación," in *El Gran Octubre y los mexicanos*, 137.

you will always be the emblem
of emancipation,
proclaimed in the ideals
of Lenin, Magón, Zapata.
Workers, cry out,
united as brothers:
Death to the tyrants!
Long live Land and Liberty!"[14]

As can be seen in the corridos, the communists fused the universal drive of the October Revolution, with the Russian leader at the forefront, with the national-popular ethos of the Mexican national struggle. The first major communist newspaper was El Machete, founded in March 1924. Although it did not record Lenin's death, the following year commemorations were already beginning, offering readers his biographical data[15], testimonies from people who knew him, and including figures such as Bukharin and Trotsky.[16]

The mystique that his figure carried was reinforced by the fact that a Mexican, a member of the PCM, was the only Latin American who left behind a personal testimony of his contact with the Russian leader: Manuel Díaz Ramírez,[17] who attended a congress of the International in 1921, left an account of his conversation with Lenin.

The anniversaries of his death or of the October Revolution (celebrated in Mexico in November) were moments when the party press, under very precarious conditions and against all odds, expressed their admiration for Lenin.[18] The reading of the leader's works was well nourished by translations made in other countries, such as Spain. Some of these were carried out by a renowned Mexican intellectual—although published abroad—Alfonso Reyes.[19]

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14. H. Martínez, "Unificación," in *El Gran Octubre y los mexicanos*, 137.
15. "Lenin. Su obra y su personalidad," *El Machete*, no. 28 (January 1925).
16. "Cómo trabajé con Lenin," *El Machete*, no. 29 (January 1925); Nicolás Bujarin, "Lenin. El camarada," *El Machete*, no. 29 (January 1925); León Trotsky, "¡Adiós, Ilich! ¡Adiós jefe!," *El Machete*, no. 30 (January 1925).
17. Manuel Díaz Ramírez, "Hablando con Lenin en 1921," *Ellos conocieron a Lenin* (Moscow: Progreso, n.d.), 256–61; and Manuel Díaz Ramírez, "Un mexicano con Lenin," in Gill Mario, comp., *México y la revolución de octubre* (Mexico City: ECP, 1978), 109–15.
18. Nicolás Lenin, "El arte de la rebelión," *El Machete*, no. 87 (November 1927).
19. Rafael Rojas, *La epopeya del sentido* (Mexico City: COLMEX, 2022), 134.

During the 1930s, on more than a few occasions, photographs, engravings, and other illustrations about Lenin appeared. The PCM sought to display his image, often on the front pages. Theoretical or productive engagement with his work was scarce in this period. Even though pamphlets signed in his name were printed—in what Sebastián Rivera Mir has called the era when "to publish was to wage war"—there was little reflection on him, except at a hagiographic level. What did appear in this sense were usually translations of Soviet authors.

For example, in January 1938, at the height of the PCM's prominence, already in firm alliance with President Cárdenas, a large edition of El Machete appeared, whose headline read: "Lenin's Thought Lives Today as Yesterday," in which fragments of Stalin's book and other notes about Lenin's life and work were included.[20] It was in this same period, as Rivera Mir recounts, that "Editorial Lenin" appeared, as an effort to publish Marxist works in Spanish.[21]

However, most references regarding Lenin at the level of Marxist theory came accompanied by praise for the Soviet Union or for Stalin. The main moment was, above all, the anniversary of the revolutionary event. For decades, communists celebrated the Russian Revolution in November as well as the Mexican one, sometimes with large rallies. For example, in 1937 the PCM managed to bring together the ruling Partido Nacional Revolucionario, exiled German anti-fascists, and the Marxist diplomat Narciso Bassols.[22]

In the 1940s, the situation accelerated in relation to the war. The PCM took as its main task the defense of the Soviet Union. The renaming of its press from El Machete to La Voz de México not only continued to promote the cult of Soviet leaders but deepened it.

In January 1943, headquartered in the Sindicato Mexicano de Electricistas, the communists paid tribute to Lenin on the anniversary of his death.[23] From the final years of El Machete and the early ones of La Voz de México, the PCM dedicated a section titled El Rincón de Lenin ("Lenin's Corner"), where long quotations on specific issues were reproduced. It was a scattered, but concentrated, way of bringing his work closer to readers, militants, and sympathizers.

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20. J. V. Stalin, "El leninismo y la cuestión nacional," *El Machete*, no. 508 (January 1938); M. Kolstov, "El último viaje," *El Machete*, no. 508 (January 1938).

21. Sebastian Rivera Mir, *Edición y comunismo: Cultura impresa, educación militante y prácticas (México, 1930–1940) (Raleigh*, NC, 2020), 114.

22. "Formidable mitin en Bellas Artes," *El Machete*, no. 499 (November 1937).

23. "Homenaje a Lenin," *La Voz de México*, no. 423 (January 1943).

The communists continued insisting on Lenin, and on some occasions he appeared in unexpected ways. For example, in the PCM journal Teoría, published in the late 1940s and early 1950s, one cover showed an Orientalized engraving of the Russian leader. With an "Asiatic" tone and a dark color, Lenin appeared less Westernized. In that same journal issue, a text titled "Backward Europe and Advanced Asia" appeared, where Lenin asserted that Europe was the expression of barbarism and Asia of revolution.

This was a Lenin critical of colonialism, something that had not been emphasized in earlier times[24] and which gained importance by highlighting the democratic movement emerging from the peripheries of the global capitalist system. It was also common to find references to the issue of the press and, in particular, the emphasis Lenin had placed on its role as a collective organizer.[25]

Sectors that had been expelled from the PCM in the 1940s formed numerous organizations that reorganized their own forces in search of becoming the vanguard party. One of those groups published the newspaper Noviembre, which from 1950 would become the newspaper of the Partido Obrero Campesino Mexicano (POCM), a communist group that sought to reintegrate into the PCM. This organization resulted from the merger of expelled collectives, the same ones that planned and carried out tributes to Lenin as part of their merger activities.[26] Like others, the POCM also paid tribute to the martyrs, such as Lenin or Luxemburg; one of its leaders, Consuelo Uranga, even openly referred in her writings on Stalinism to the debate with Lenin about the excessive organizational centralism he had proposed.[27] Although with less influence than the PCM, the POCM expressed well during its short life—the decade of the 1950s—the blending between the ideology of the Mexican Revolution and that of the Russian Revolution, its slogan being: "For the Mexican Revolution, towards socialism."

The press of this group showed very elementary reflections around Lenin, such as, for example, on the way Lenin forged the instrument to confront the "historical inevitability" of the fall of capitalism[28]; how "Leninism" was the

24. V. I. Lenin, "La Europa atrasada y el Asia Avanzada," *Teoría: revista teórica del PCM*.

25. "El periódico no es sólo propagandista y agitador colectivo: es también un organizador colectivo," *La Voz de México*, no. 830 (March 19, 1954).

26. "Cálido mitin a la memoria de Lenin," *Noviembre* 5 (February 5, 1949).

27. Consuelo Uranga, "Recordando a Carlos Liebknecht y Rosa Luxemburgo," *Noviembre,* 161 (January 7, 1957).

28. Alberto Lumbreras, "Gloria eterna al camarada Lenin," *Noviembre* (February 8, 1951).

"supreme conquest of Russian and world culture"[29]; or the need to face the fact that, in personal terms, it was not possible to avoid mistakes in political work.[30] Fragments of poems, such as those of Mayakovsky, were also reproduced in its pages, on the occasion of the 34th anniversary of his death.[31]

It was only in the 1960s that something changed in Mexican communism. Breaking with the immediate past, a new leadership headed by Arnoldo Martínez Verdugo, who definitively assumed command between 1959 and 1961, made Lenin cease to be merely a symbolic reference and turn into a productive motive. Although there are no extensive texts from that period, testimonies insist that Lenin was reread in the key of a theorist of hegemony. In a Gramscian perspective, this group, which would eventually reform from within the PCM—the oldest organization in the country—was inspired by Lenin, leaving behind the image of a bronze statue, trapped in time and only to be worshiped, to recover him as a political theorist in whom the relationship between socialism and democracy could be grounded.

It was no surprise, then, that the PCM was one of the first to condemn the Soviet intervention of Czechoslovakia in 1968, to accompany the student movement of that time, to denounce the concept of vanguardism, and, finally, to chart the steps to incorporate the communist organization into the conquest of democracy as the fundamental goal of political activity.

The importance of Lenin was reflected in the effort undertaken by the party press publishing house Ediciones de Cultura Popular to print in co-edition with the Spanish publisher Akal the Obras completas (Collected Works), one of the highest-quality and most widely circulated editions in Spanish. Elvira Concheiro, a key protagonist of this history from Martínez Verdugo's circle, stated:

> *"We owe him the impetus for substantial debates in the pages of Historia y Sociedad, Socialismo, El Machete, Memoria, on issues such as what it means to build counter-hegemony in a country like ours, for which he also promoted the study of Gramsci and of an unknown Lenin, one who escaped the mold that Stalinism had tailored to its measure."*[32]

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29. "El triunfo del leninismo," *Noviembre.* 63 (January 16, 1954).
30. "La herencia de Lenin para afrontar los errores," *Noviembre*, 162 (January 22, 1957).
31. "Lenin." *Noviembre*, no. 183 (January 11, 1958).
32. Elvira Concheiro, "Arnoldo Martínez Verdugo: comunista revolucionario," *La Jornada*, June 4, 2013.

In 1970, on the anniversary of his death, numerous tributes took place in Mexico City. One important event was held in the city by the Institute of Cultural Exchange, which devoted sessions to honoring Lenin.[33] There was also a pro-Soviet current within the Partido Popular Socialista, in which Carlos Sánchez Cárdenas spoke during those years.[34] Of course, the press of the PCM, then inaugurated with the biweekly Oposición,[35] dedicated several texts to thinking about Lenin, while featuring on its cover an engraving by David Alfaro Siqueiros dedicated to the revolutionary leader, which would later be raffled among the subscribers of the publication. The communist press reported on rallies held at the Teatro Lírico and in the Sindicato Mexicano de Electricistas, with the attendance of ambassadors from socialist countries, journalists, and figures such as Clementina Batalla, David Alfaro Siqueiros, Wenceslao Roces, and the historian Adelina Zendejas.[36]

In the pages of the communist biweekly, a manifesto was also published, signed by several dozen painters, poets, professors, leftist leaders, and intellectuals, which declared:

> *"In remembering Lenin, we affirm our revolutionary principles and our determination not to cease our activity so that our homeland, Mexico, may also embark on the socialist path, the only regime that will ensure for our people liberty, bread, culture, peace, and security in the future."*[37]

In the festive atmosphere, former president Cárdenas sent a greeting to one of those gatherings, in which it was stated that Lenin's contribution, "tied to Latin America, is having valued the anti-imperialist action of dependent countries [and that] in Lenin were united exceptional qualities of leadership. He was an intellectual who knew how to listen to and learn from the people; a notable polemicist, analytical and grounded in reality, nationalist in the face of imperialism, and internationalist in proletarian solidarity." He concluded by saying that "It is necessary to emphasize, in light of the justified yearnings for

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33. *Significación de la obra humanista de Vladimir Ilich Lenin* (Mexico City: Instituto de Amistad e Intercambio Cultural México–URSS, 1970).

34. Carlos Sánchez Cárdenas, *Presencia de Lenin en el mundo contemporáneo* (Mexico, 1969).

35. "En el centenario de V. I. Lenin," *Oposición,* 1 (1970): 4; Juan Dich, "Lenin, universal y presente," *Oposición* 1 (1970): 22; Manuel Terrazas, "Vincularse siempre a las masas," *Oposición* 1 (1970): 23–24.

36. "Conmemoraciones del centenario de V. I. Lenin." *Oposición* 3 (1970): 37

37. "En el centenario de Vladimir Ilich Lenin." *Oposición* 3 (1970): 36.

liberty and justice of the new generations, that Lenin knew how to value democratic, agrarian, and anti-imperialist revolutions."[38] Little by little, the flame of revolution would fade, and the communists would increasingly align themselves with the struggle for the conquest of democracy as the great sign of the times.

Theorists, Philosophers, and Economists

Lenin's presence was symbolic. It mobilized the political imagination of the communists and generated a cult around a figure whose actions were considered a clear example of the path to follow. This saturated the name of Lenin with hagiographic references, the formulation of a cult, halfway between the glorification of political action and the defense of a state power on the other side of the world.

However, there were various attempts to make Lenin a theoretical reference, something more than a statue or a quote made regarding the importance of the propaganda party. This forces us to look again at some smaller openings in which it became possible—in other writings I have outlined the main contours of reception and productive appropriation of Lenin that have taken place in the Latin American region. I have been especially interested in the theoretical perspective. Whether as a theory of political intervention, as an anti-colonial exercise, or as a useful element in theoretical accumulation, Lenin allowed Latin American Marxism to renew itself.

In the case of Mexico, this situation is more complex. Since Mexico was a country where high culture, the intellectual world, and even a sector of the political class sympathized with, were familiar with, or paid tribute to Marxism, the presence of Lenin was constant, but it was not the main one. In the academic world, the persistent study of Marx is clear, especially with regard to the work *Capital*; in curricula, it was common to see bibliographies on the theme of Lenin's imperialism, as a second stage of what was called "political economy." In political science and sociology programs, it was also common to read texts such as *The State and Revolution*; for example, in recent times, President Andrés Manuel López Obrador recalled how, in the context of the

38. Lázaro Cárdenas. In *Lenin y la América Latina*, edited by José Consuegra. Barranquilla: Universidad del Atlántico, 1970.

Chilean situation of 1973, a professor gave him that work of Lenin to read, as a kind of "interpretive key."[39]

The possibility of reading Lenin theoretically had a few stellar moments, much fewer than the references to Marx in terms of quantity and far less famous compared to the reading of Gramsci, which had already been rehearsed on numerous occasions. One of the first theoretical works that reaffirmed Lenin in the field of academic philosophy was that of Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez, who, in the second edition of his classic work, decided to include a chapter where he discussed the Russian as a theorist of praxis, analyzing the debates around external consciousness, economism, and class consciousness. On the opposite side of Sánchez Vázquez stood the political scientist Raúl Olmedo—who had studied in France with Althusser—who undertook a reading of Lenin by vindicating the work *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, unfolding an anti-dialectical argument. In a text entitled "Lenin's Reproach to Engels about the Dialectic", Olmedo traced Lenin's criticisms of Engels in the way dialectical thinking and the method of exposition were expressed. Olmedo deduced that with Lenin, any possibility of conceiving dialectics inherited from Hegel as an adequate theoretical option of knowledge for Marxism (in the field of history) disappeared, since in the scientific procedure[40] dialectics could not serve that function as a process of knowledge construction, but rather with the guarantee of the correspondence of knowledge with the object. Where Lenin saw Althusserian-style epistemology, Olmedo thought that for Marxism the philosophy of history was left as the method of construction of scientific knowledge.

Olmedo also gathered a group of students who, in this line, produced an entire issue of an academic journal dedicated to analyzing *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, something truly unusual. For Olmedo, Lenin, by rejecting dialectical reading, operated with the criterion of "scientific practice." It was no coincidence that the Mexican "Althusserian school" invited with emphasis the Frenchman Dominique Lecourt, who wrote a work on Lenin's position in philosophy.[41] That Dominique Lecourt visited Mexico to strengthen a perspective of the philosophy of science had as a consequence that some members of that academic circle carried out serious reflections on Lenin. The

39. López Obrador. "En Chile: 'Allende es el presidente extranjero que más admiro.' " *El País*, September 10, 2023.

40. Raúl Olmedo, "Autocrítica: la totalidad como metáfora," *La Cultura en México*, p. XII.

41. Víctor Manuel Muñoz and Yolanda Trápaga, "Diálogo con Domenique Lecourt," *La Cultura en México*, pp. IV–V.

Figure 2: Figure 2: Peasants reading El Machete, 1922 (Photo: Tina Modotti, source: Museum of Modern Art – MoMA).

philosopher Cesáreo Morales read *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, detecting that that work allowed the history of philosophy to be delineated as the confrontation between materialism and idealism which, "in the last instance," was a class position.[42]

Opposed to the Althusserian line, the philosopher Gabriel Vargas Lozano carried out his reading of the question of philosophy in Lenin. He highlighted—unlike Olmedo—the distance that existed between works such as *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* and the *Philosophical Notebooks*. He emphasized a critique of the Althusserian thesis that in Lenin one did not find a new philosophy, but only a practice of philosophy. A debtor to the "philosophy of praxis," Vargas Lozano did not maintain that such a thesis was correct, but only partially so, and that Lenin's contribution could only be understood if Marxism was considered a new philosophy, that is, as a conception of the world formulated for its transformation.[43]

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42. Cesáreo Morales, "Lenin y la filosofía," in *Filosofía, ciencia y política* (México: Nueva Imagen, 1980), 64.

43. Gabriel Vargas Lozano, "Lenin: ¿nueva práctica de la filosofía o nueva filosofía de la praxis?," *Dialéctica* 11 (1981): 91–103.

Finally, although unpublished, notes by the philosopher Luis Villoro—with sympathies toward the national-popular—are preserved regarding Lenin's works[44], although he was a figure distant from Marxism and political militancy. His prestige as a progressive intellectual, however, remains in the cultural reservoir of the country.

In the field of economic analysis, there were also glimpses of an attempt to renew Marxism. This was the case with the works of the economists Alonso Aguilar Monteverde and Enrique Semo. Both, prolific Marxists, focused on demonstrating the potential of Lenin's proposal on state monopoly capital. Semo, a member of the PCM since the 1960s, developed a diagnosis of the perspective of state monopoly capital, pointing out that for Lenin this was not a concept that developed exclusively in central economies. Harshly criticizing various dependency theories, he assumed that countries like Mexico, Brazil, or Argentina, considered medium-scale nations—that is, neither industrial powers nor entirely their opposite—the concept could be useful. He noted that, for Lenin, industrialized economies and non-industrialized economies operated in unity of opposites, where linearity was not permitted, which allowed him to think of the appearance of national monopolies without necessarily implying the phenomenon of capital export and domination over other nations, referring to the case of these Latin American countries. From this, Semo derived an analysis of the State, in which he pointed out that the category of state monopoly capital served both to describe forms of oppression and domination, but also as the organizational form that laid the foundations for socialism, in societies not fully industrialized, by being an organizing instrument of important branches of production. All this was the result of the fact that our Latin American societies were "pluriparticular," that is, where diverse modes of production were articulated, but also overlapped and intertwined at different levels of capitalist development.[45]

For his part, Alonso Aguilar Monteverde came from radical nationalism, whose main figure was General Lázaro Cárdenas. In the 1970s, he published *Teoría leninista del imperialismo* in Mexico and Cuba. Several guidelines of Aguilar's work make it original. First of all, his study of imperialism does not focus on a single stage of Lenin's thought, but rather carries out an operation of comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon within the corpus of his

44. Luis Villoro, "Lenin," *Fondo Luis Villoro*, Caja 6, Carpeta 34, fojas 49–59, Biblioteca Eduardo García Máynez, Ciudad de México.

45. Enrique Semo, "Lenin, la teoría del capitalismo monopolista de Estado y los países capitalistas intermedios," *Coyacán: revista marxista latinoamericana* 4 (1978): 101–121.

work. He does so both from his studies of Russian capitalism at the beginning of the 20th century and from the development of the political struggle in the reformist versions of the Second International.

The central objective of Aguilar Monteverde's text is twofold: on the one hand, to demonstrate that the category of imperialism is constructed in Lenin's thought, both theoretically and politically, beyond his 1916 work; and on the other, to consolidate the category of state monopoly capital. Regarding the first aspect, it should be noted that Aguilar's text meticulously traces both the political polemics and the methodological evolution that Lenin carried out in his economic analyses. His study of the Notebooks on Imperialism stands out, in which he expands Lenin's criticisms of John Hobson, the first among the left-wing sectors to formulate the category of imperialism.

On the second theme, for Aguilar, Lenin is a criterion of authority to reinforce the notion of monopoly capital. Textually, he demonstrates that Lenin used this category and undertakes a second approach to the texts to show the centrality of the interventionist State in the economy after the famous work of 1916. According to this hypothesis, imperialism was not only defined as the era of the fusion of banking and industrial capital with the corresponding dominance of monopolies, but also as a time when these monopolies had merged with the state bureaucratic structure. Monopoly capital would arise from the close relationship between monopolies and the State, and—as Lenin's words state—through "a single mechanism […] [it] becomes a fundamental part of the very economic structure, exploits a growing number of wage workers, extracts large masses of surplus value directly, and acquires a decisive importance in the accumulation process." [46] Aguilar Monteverde's conceptions yielded other insights, for example, his insistence that the Mexican political regime was not the construction of a bureaucracy that ruled above social classes (and its consensus), but was nothing more than the result of the fusion of the bourgeoisie with the State. His work *The Bourgeoisie, the Oligarchy and the State* seeks to demonstrate this through an empirical study of the business relations of the Mexican political elite.

This does not mean, however, that his work cannot be reread with interest as an attempt at renewal, a product of the Cuban Revolution, as is evident when he writes that in Mariátegui, Mella, and Che Guevara lies "the Leninism that is

46. Alonso Aguilar Monteverde, *Teoría leninista del imperialismo* (México: Nuestro Tiempo, 1978), 180–81.

needed.[47]" At a crossroads between renewal and certainty, Aguilar delivers a work useful for the study of Lenin's thought, although limited in its conceptions.

Other profound intellectuals also drew upon Lenin's position. Such was the case of the translator of Marx's works and Spanish exile Wenceslao Roces, who celebrated the centenary of his birth in 1970, highlighting the Russian's contributions regarding internationalism, the construction of the party, and the centrality of youth. His lecture, delivered at the Casa "España Popular," emphasized the central point and originality of his contribution: "The freedom that, in order to serve, has force at its disposal, instead of being overwhelmed by it. The freedom to break all chains and establish a socialist world: this is how Lenin conceived of freedom.[48]" Also, within the framework of that commemoration, the writer Germán List Arzubide offered some words about the leader's path toward the revolutionary process. At that time, political scientist, intellectual, and university official Víctor Flores Olea delivered a suggestive essay on the relationship between Lenin and politics. In that same period, Carlos Thierry Zubieta, from the Mexican Student Socialist Party of the School of Economics, wrote about the relationship between Lenin and youth; all these materials were later published in the journal Cuadernos Americanos, in its August 1970 issue. In that same publication, a few years later, a journalist rooted in the national-popular tradition, close to President Cárdenas, wrote about Lenin and the State he founded, during the "steps forward and setbacks" that it had experienced since his death.[49]

The last great moment of this trajectory was the small debate around Lenin that appeared in the magazine El Machete, which revived the name of the historic communist newspaper. This publication represented a moment of renewal for the PCM, being a heretical publication, of great intellectual and cultural openness. The debate was initiated by an Argentine exile in Mexico, the philosopher Oscar del Barco, who had made a harsh critique of Lenin in a book published at the University of Puebla[50]—an institution controlled by the PCM in those years—and who summarized in a brief text his thesis of the continuity between Lenin and Stalin, and that the political degeneration of the Soviet

47. Alonso Aguilar Monteverde, *Teoría leninista*, 461.

48. Wenceslao Roces, *Lenin. Rasgos de su vida y su obra* (México: s/e, 1970).

49. Francisco Martínez de la Vega, "Sesenta años después de la revolución de Lenin," *Cuadernos Americanos*, no. 1, vol. CCXVI (1978), 42.

50. Oscar del Barco, *Esbozo de una crítica a la teoría y práctica del leninismo* (Puebla: UAP, 1980).

Union was due to a deviation carried out by the second.[51] The next issue of the communist publication allowed the release of a text that nuanced the appreciation of Lenin, written by Luciano Gruppi—an author who had been translated, along with a longer work on Lenin—in which he pointed out the positive aspects of his theoretical approaches, situating them on a practical and concrete level.[52] However, Del Barco's text received a prompt response from the Althusserian philosopher Luis Salazar Carrión, who criticized the Argentine for considering him an anti-communist who misjudged Lenin's attitudes and theoretical work. Although Salazar carried out his own critique of the Russian leader, he avoided falling into the reductionism he saw in the Argentine, whose anti-communist stance clouded the understanding of what was an integral conception of Lenin.[53]

Murals, Engravings, and Caricatures

The cultural history of communism and Marxism in Mexico cannot be understood without the imprint of artists: painters, engravers, composers, poets. Lenin is a constant motif among graphic artists, whose legacy is inseparable from this form of political intervention. Although it is a well-known theme, we will briefly refer to the main appearances.

It is evident that the figure of Diego Rivera gains importance in this regard. The mural he created in the Rockefeller building in New York—later destroyed—was perhaps the clearest sign that, for Mexicans and their revolution in relation to the Soviet one, Lenin always functioned as a bridge. Later, Rivera painted in the Palacio de Bellas Artes in Mexico City the well-known mural Man, Controller of the Universe (alternatively, Man at the Crossroads). Rivera's effort places historical processes, the course of science, technology, and, of course, the revolution itself as something necessary to be analyzed. Rivera revisited Lenin (and Trotsky) in Russian Revolution or Third International, where the two leaders can be seen addressing the armies of the dispossessed, with varied skin tones and gestures, as well as the militia troops born of the Russian Revolution.

Frida Kahlo also took part in this incursion, where Lenin was a constant presence, alongside Stalin. Another artist who used Lenin in his murals was

51. Oscar del Barco, "¿Era Lenin un perverso?," *El machete* 3 (1980): 23–26.
52. Lucino Gruppi, "El leninismo de Lenin," *El machete* 4 (1980): 39–43.
53. Luis Salazar, "Lenin: la impertinente realidad," *El machete* 6 (1980): 41–43.

Miguel Covarrubias, who depicted the destruction of Rivera's mural, particularly the moment when Rockefeller encountered Lenin. Muralism reflected both the prestige of the Soviet Union and the attempt to merge it with local history. Regardless of Rivera and Kahlo's organizational affiliation (from communism to Trotskyism and back again to communism), figures like Lenin always had a place in their works.

Less present among the printmakers—who could be considered the ideological successors of the muralists—of the famous Taller de la Gráfica Popular, some noteworthy details can nevertheless be found. Most of those who were part of the Taller de la Gráfica adhered to Marxism and organized themselves around the great figures of the left. Among the few printmakers who took the opportunity to depict Lenin was Luis Arenal, who was active in the PCM and expelled from it in the 1940s, later joining other groups. His engraving shows a boy, with strong peasant and Indigenous features, reading a book by Marx and another by Stalin, while Lenin's name appears in yet another book off to the side, which the boy points to.

This engraving is important because it demonstrates not only the cult of Lenin's figure, but also the appropriation of it by the dispossessed masses.

Many years later, the muralist José Hernández Delgadillo also painted, in the auditorium of the Faculty of Sciences of the National University, the effigies of Marx, Engels, and Lenin. This triad expressed the militancy of Hernández Delgadillo, who "participated in workers' strikes, land occupations, irregular urban settlements, and student protests;"[54] halfway between Maoism and the post-PCM interpretation of the 1980s.

The visual legacy shifted from murals to engravings, but it reached its greatest height with caricature. Lenin took a prominent place, alongside Marx and Mao Tse-Tung, as one of the most frequently drawn figures, always with a pedagogical intention. Published by the PCM's publishing house, Ediciones de Cultura Popular, *Lenin for Beginners* appeared in 1975, a work created by the caricaturist and militant Rius. This book functioned as a biography that explained his life's twists and turns. In addition to several editions in Mexico —by publishers such as Grijalbo— *Lenin for Beginners* was also published in Spain by the publisher Akal.

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54. Luis Hernández Navarro, "José Hernández Delgadillo, elogio al muralismo," *La Jornada*, March 1, 2022.

Finally, as a corollary to Lenin's artistic presence and going beyond graphic forms, it is necessary to mention the writer Guillermo Samperio, who compiled a series of stories under the title *Lenin in Soccer*, in which the piece of the same name tells the story of an attempt to create a soccer players' union, one that ultimately failed. Here again, Lenin's image is associated with the struggle of the workers of the ball.

This overview shows how Lenin occupied a special place in Mexican cultural traditions—political, artistic, and cultural. This was part of the expansive wave of the October Revolution, which established him as a constant subject of reflection. Regardless of the manner in which he was received, his presence became part of a political culture that, in the Mexican context, wove together global traditions with local ones.

Final Reflections

The history of communism in Mexico began in 1919 and concluded around 1988, when the leftist currents associated with this political family merged with the strands of nationalist-populism. The PCM had already taken steps toward fading away when it dissolved together with other organizations, giving rise to the Unified Socialist Party of Mexico, which still preserved Marxist rhetoric and the hammer and sickle in 1981. By 1986, this organization disappeared into the Mexican Socialist Party, the result of a merger with leftist nationalism.

In 1988, history surprised the left when it faced an unexpected social phenomenon: the presidential candidacy of a figure with great capacity to mobilize the masses. This definitively ended the open and public presence of symbols associated with communism and the political language of socialism. Finally, 1989 closed that period with changes on a global scale.

After that date, it is difficult to find references, reflections, publications, or significant spaces about Lenin. The 1990s became the era of neoliberal vandalism, and Marxism only regained some intellectual presence—though not political—toward the first decade of the new century. In this stage, reflections on imperialism reappeared, both critical and positive[55]. Intellectuals of importance to the left, such as Elvira Concheiro[56] and Enrique Dussel,[57]

55. Mario Rivera, "Lenin y la revolución antiimperialista," *La Tecla indómita*, 2nd ser., fasc. 3 (2003): 9–28.

56. Elvira Concheiro, "De nuevo Lenin," *Memoria* 276 (2020–4): 84–93.

57. Enrique Dussel, *Siete ensayos de filosofía de la liberación* (Madrid: Trotta, 2020).

insisted on the need to think about Lenin. On the centenary of his death—2023—youth from the governing party, the Movimiento de Regeneración Nacional, promoted a tribute to the revolutionary leader. It remains to be seen whether this gesture by the ruling left was the sedimentation of that legacy or if it was an example of the "excess of memory" of which Bruno Bosteels[58] speaks.

58. Bruno Bosteels, *Marx y Freud en América Latina* (Madrid: Akal, 2014).

3

A World-Historic Shift: Hegel, Marx, and Labour[1]

Carlos L. Garrido[2]

Ten years before his death, in the midst of an era which treated Hegel as a "dead dog," Marx would "openly [avow]" himself a "pupil" of that "mighty thinker."[3] In this same work, he would conclude the analogy Engels drew fourteen years earlier and say that the "mystification which dialectics suffers in Hegel's hands" caused it to be "standing on its head," and to discover the

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1. This article was originally accepted for publication in an academic journal in 2020. However, the journal was subsequently discontinued before the piece could appear in print. As it has never been publicly available, we are publishing it here for the first time. For further discussion of the author's perspective on the Hegel-Marx transition, see: "The Marxist Sublation of Hegel," *Red America* 001 (November 2024): https://redamerica.acp.us.

2. Carlos L. Garrido is a Cuban American philosophy professor. He is the Director of the Midwestern Marx Institute and the Secretary of Education of the American Communist Party. He has authored many books, including *The Purity Fetish and the Crisis of Western Marxism (2023)*, *Why We Need American Marxism (2024)*, *Marxism and the Dialectical Materialist Worldview (2022)*, and the forthcoming *On Losurdo's Western Marxism (2025)* and *Hegel, Marxism, and Dialectics (2025)*. He has written for dozens of scholarly and popular publications around the world and runs various live-broadcast shows for the Midwestern Marx Institute YouTube. Subscribe to his Substack: *Philosophy in Crisis*.

3. Marx, Karl. "Afterward to the Second German Edition." In *Capital: Volume 1*. (New York: International Publishers, 1967), 19-20.

"rational kernel within the mystical shell" it must be "turned right side up."[4] In this paper, I do not wish to return to a 1960s beaten-down polemic about the influence of Hegel on Marx *in toto*. Neither do I wish to examine, as the previous quote suggests, how Marx recaptured the rational kernel of Hegel's upside-down dialectics. The scope of this essay is in the exposition of what I describe as a *world-historic break* in the conception of labor affected by Hegel, and how this conception of labor influences and has its internal contradictions solved by Marx.

Before I begin my exposition, a few clarifications must be made. First, because my object of inquiry ties Marx's conception of labor to Hegel's does not mean I reject the considerable influence coming from English political economy (from Locke to Smith), from Ricardian (Gray, Bray, Thompson) and utopian (Saint-Simon, Fourier, Owen) socialists, from the left-Hegelians (Feuerbach, Cieszkowski), from Thomas Carlyle, or from the American tradition of radical republicanism (mainly Skidmore, and Byllesby through him).[5] Thinkers from

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4. See his 1859 book review of Karl Marx's *Contributions to the Critique of Political Economy*. Marx, Karl. "Afterward to the Second German Edition." 20.

5. Although the influence of Adam Smith and David Ricardo on Marx's economic thought is well-known, it is often overlooked that the labor theory of value already existed in an embryonic form in John Locke. Over two decades before the birth of Smith, Locke would propose in his *Second Treatise on Government* that "it is labour indeed that puts the difference of value on every thing." Locke, John. *Second Treatise on Government* (Hacket, 1980), 25. Again, although the influence of the most prominent utopian socialists, viz., Saint-Simon, Fourier, and Owens on Marxism is well known – documented especially well in Engels' *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* where along with Hegel's dialectics is put as a precondition for scientific socialism – utopian socialists and economists such as John Gray, John Francis Bray, and William Thompson prove essential in the development of Marx's economic thought in the formative years between 1843-1847 where extensive quotation of the former can be seen in published works such as *The Poverty of Philosophy* and posthumously published manuscripts such as *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*. Similarly, although the influence of Feuerbach is well documented, August Von Cieszkowski's 1938 *Prolegomena zur Historiosophie* provides the concept of "praxis" which is quite akin to how the early Marx was thinking about labor. Although, to my knowledge, Cieszkowski is never cited by Marx, it is likely that his prominence in the left-Hegelian groups the young Marx occupied would have played an influence in Marx's reformulation of Feuerbach's concept of the species-being away from its theological grounding and towards a foundation found in labor. A similar influence could be found in Thomas Carlyle, who in his *Past and Present* (1843) expresses a romanticism of labor similar to how Marx would formulate it a couple years later. In a book review the following year a young Engels would call Carlyle's text the only English book "worth reading" from 1843. This was around the time of Engels' research and writing of *The Conditions of the Working Class in England*. This review was done a few months before the famous Parisian second encounter between Marx and Engels in August 1844. Lastly, in regard to American labor radical republicans such as Thomas Skidmore and Langdon Byllesby, Marx's 1841-1842 notebooks on political economy show extensive citation of passages from Thomas Hamilton's *Men and Manners in America* which actually came from an abridge speech version of Skidmore's *The Rights of Man to Property!* which was delivered to the Workingmen's Party in New York. For more on the connection to Skidmore read Alex Gourevitch *Jacobin* article "Wage-Slavery and Republican Liberty" and for

these different traditions are greatly influential in the development of the core philosophical positions in Marx. Nonetheless, the focus will be on Hegel's influence because he is the first to break beyond the conceptual bondage which saw labor merely as a means for consumption. It is in Hegel's conception of labor where labor is treated as a dignified, essentially human activity which can be meaningfully done for its own sake. This conceptual break, I will argue, reaches its epitome in Marx. In addition, the comparative section of this essay will limit itself to the contributions Marx makes within the ontological and anthropological dimensions of labor.[6] Hence, the primarily economic contributions, viz., the theory of surplus value and its implications, will be outside of the focus of the essay and not included within the comparative section.[7]

It is also important to clarify that the form of labor I will focus upon is the physical labor that lends itself to the production of a tangible material good; that labor which Adam Smith has said creates an object that "endures after that labour is past."[8] The reason for doing so is not that I endorse a physicalist interpretation of Hegel's or Marx's views on labor, *i.e.,* I don't believe their conceptualization of labor is reducible to only physical labor of this kind. Rather, I agree with Sean Sayers that the Hegelian and Marxist conceptions of labor can "assimilate all kinds of work," from the most primitive forms of direct appropriation to contemporary post-industrial work.[9]

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more on the connection and thought of Byllesby read my *Journal of American Socialist Studies* article "Making American Socialism Scientific: Exploring Langdon Byllesby."

6. I add the distinction between ontological and anthropological because in works like "Critical Marginal Notes on the Article 'The King of Prussia and Social Reform' " (1844), *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, and *The Holy Family,* labor's centrality in human life remains within the confines of a Feuerbachian philosophical problematic, while the centrality of labor in places like *The German Ideology*, *Capital Vol 1*, "Critique of the Gotha Program", and Engels' *Dialectics of Nature,* break out of this problematic into the realm of the scientific *qua* anthropological.

7. I do not wish to draw a wedge between the economic and non-economic conceptualizations of labor and its implications for human life. The economic dimension is inseparable from the ontological/anthropological and attempting to separate the one from the other would make both unintelligible. I merely wish to center the focus of analysis on the sphere most commensurable with Hegel's treatment, and that requires, to my judgement, focusing more extensively on one part of the whole of Marx and Engels' conceptualizations of labor.

8. Smith, Adam. *The Wealth of Nations* (Meta Libri, 2007), 258-9.

9. Sayers, S, "The Concept of Labour: Marx and His Critics," *Science and Society*. Vol. 71, no. 4, 2007, pp. 431-454. DOI:10.1521/siso.2007.71.4., 431, 435. To be clear, this is Sayer's argument, I don't think Hegel would endorse direct appropriation as 'labor,' for in the *Philosophy of Right*, when he describes labor as a "moment of liberation," it is as a response to the romanticized views of a state of nature when everything is provided for and there is no need for work. I am also speaking of labor in general here, which could be of a productive and unproductive kind according to Marx (his conception of productive versus unproductive

My focus will be on physical labor because it has historically been between being disparaged on the one hand and considered an unfortunate necessity on the other. The Greeks and Romans relegated this sort of work to slaves, former slaves, or foreigners; the free citizenry would not do this work, and, often, would not work at all. The bourgeois theorists of the dismal science also held that labor could not fundamentally be anything more than a means towards consumption.[10] For Smith, that "consumption is the sole end and purpose of all production," was something he saw as so obvious that it required no explanation.[11] Physical labor, unlike the mental labor of philosophers, poets, and writers, has historically not been seen in a favorable light, even though to do the latter you need the former. Aristotle, of course, famously considered that the precondition for philosophy and advanced sciences was having the basic needs of life met, which presupposes physical labor done by someone.[12] In Hegel's theory of labor, and again in Marx's, physical work is dignified. For Hegel, labor contains a moment of liberation necessary to achieve true self-consciousness. For Marx, labor is not only the life-activity of humanity as species being, but the class which participates in labor is the universal emancipatory agent capable of solving the "riddle of history."[13]

My attempt to trace the concept of labor in Marx back to Hegel, and further, to establish Hegel's concept of labor as a radical break with how labor was thought of before, was the focus of bourgeois political theorist R.N. Berki in his 1979 article "On the Nature and Origins of Marx's Concept of Labor." In this essay his conclusion is diametric to mine, viz., he argues labor does not play an

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is different from Smith's, who reduces productive to simply the work that produces tangible products).

10. "Dismal Science" is how Thomas Carlyle characterized economics. This concept was first seen in his 1849 *Fraser's Magazine* article "Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question."

11. Smith. *The Wealth of Nations*, 512.

12. Aristotle had already noted that it "was when almost all the necessities of life and the things that make for comfort and recreation had been secured," that philosophy and the pursuit of science "in order to know, and not for any utilitarian end… began to be sought." Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle* (Chapel Hill: The Modern Library, 2001), 692 (982b).

13. Although Marx removes some of this Feuerbach inspired jargon from his language, labor is nonetheless always considered an essential and fulfilling activity for the species. In *The German Ideology*, where some say there is an epistemic break in Marx, the concept of labor as self-activity continues to appear (even though he says communism abolishes labor, it establishes the conditions of labor as self-activity, by abolishing the conditions of labor in class society). Even in his 1875 *Critique of the Gotha Program*, in the highest phase of communism labor appears as the prime want of life. Marx, Karl. "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right: Introduction." In *The Marx-Engels Reader* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978), 64-65. Marx, Karl. *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844,* (Promethius Books, 1988), 103.

important role for Hegel, and subsequently, that Marx's concept of labor bears no substantial influence from Hegel's. Let me examine what his comments are before I continue.

There are two central moves Berki makes in his essay: the first concerns tearing the centrality of the concept of labor from Hegel, and the second is a tearing of what is left of that concept from having any connection with Marx. To argue that Hegel does not have labor as a central focus, he does not focus on what Hegel says, but on the duration and frequency of Hegel's engagement with labor. Berki argues that the *Phenomenology of Spirit'*s lord and bondsman dialectic comes "deceptively close to the subsequent Marxian view," but that it is a "subordinate part" of the book that is "superseded and overshadowed" by "far more important" sections of the text. [14] Then, in the *Philosophy of Right* he argues that the favorable comments on labor are limited to "three short paragraphs," which, according to Berki, shows that it is "quite clear" that, for Hegel, "labor here still counts as a derivative activity, occasioned by the increase and diversification of human need in modern society."[15]

Berki's contortions allow for whatever is left of Hegel's concept of labor to be no different than how it was thought of before him. As such, it becomes quite easy to widen the gap between Hegel and Marx. Therefore, he concludes that, "the gap between Hegel's and Marx's respective conceptions of labor is so wide as to make it problematic, if not implausible, to look upon the latter as having originated in any serious sense at all in the former."[16] I will now hope to demonstrate the truth in the implausible by engaging with what Hegel actually says, without limiting myself to how often or for how long he says it; although, the paradox here is that the theme of labor appears throughout his whole life, from the "Jenna Lectures" to the *Philosophy of Right.* To stay consistent with the material Berki engages with for his conclusion, I will examine how labor appears in the *Phenomenology* and in the *Philosophy of Right*.

In his famed Lord and Bondsman section of his *Phenomenology of Spirit* Hegel describes the encounter of two self-consciousness with each other, an event plagued with a mutual desire for recognition. After a series of ambiguous supersessions between the two consciousness, this encounter leads to a life and death struggle, for "only through staking one's life is freedom won."[17]

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14. Berki, R.N., "On the Nature and Origins of Marx's Concept of Labor," *Political Theory*. Vol. 7, No. 1, 1979, 35-56. http://www.jstor.org/stable/190823. 40.
15. Ibid., 40-41.
16. Ibid., 42.
17. Hegel, Georg. *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) 114.

Realizing that "death is the natural negation of consciousness," for he who is dead cannot think and he who requires recognition for self-consciousness that *is in and for itself* cannot get it from a dead man, this infantile skirmish ends with one submitting to the other.[18] This submission gives rise to the lord and bondsman, the former who posits himself as "pure self-conscious" and the latter as "merely immediate consciousness, or consciousness in the form of thinghood."[19]

The lord, although positing himself as "pure self-consciousness," is unable to receive anything but an insufficient, "one-sided and unequal" recognition. The bondsman, on the other hand, holds the capacity for being "transformed into a truly independent consciousness" because of his labor. [20] Hegel states that it is "*through work*… [that] the bondsman becomes conscious of what he truly is."[21] The bondsman's labor, i.e., his "formative activity," actively transforms nature to express his "individuality or pure being-for-self of consciousness," and in doing so makes a permanent independent object.[22] In facing the permanence and independence of his individuality's externalization expressed in his object the worker is able to negate his condition as a dependent consciousness for his lord and affirm himself as an independent true self-consciousness.

In his *Philosophy of Right* Hegel states that, "it is only through the development of his body and mind, essentially through his self-consciousness' apprehension of itself as free, that he takes possession of himself and becomes his own property and no one else's."[23] When this quote is contextualized with the dialectic of the lord and bondsman one can see that it is labor which allows humanity to break out of its immediate existence and become fully human. Labor, in essence, creates the conditions for a qualitative leap into the truly human. It is in the formative activity that labor plays on nature where meaning is introduced into the world. Through the externalization of my will I crystalize into the things of the world "my being, my universal activity and actuality, my personality," I give the things in the world their "destiny and soul." [24] This is precisely why for Hegel there is a "moment of liberation intrinsic to work," in

18. Ibid.
19. Ibid., 115.
20. Ibid., 115, 116, 117.
21. Ibid., 118.
22. Ibid.
23. Hegel, Georg. *Philosophy of Right,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978) 47.
24. Ibid., 54, 41.

work I realize myself as a conscious human being while simultaneously engraving a *telos* into the world. [25]

It should be clear that labor, for Hegel, is *the* condition for the possibility of fully human living. Labor is effectively what opens the door for the dialectical unfolding of spirit. The centrality Hegel gives labor creates a *world-historic break* in its conceptualization. Labor is no longer *just* a value-creating social activity which engages in producing to satisfy community needs. Labor itself is presupposed by the human community *qua* human community. Labor is, as Marx would go on to state in *The German Ideology*, the "first historical act."[26] In this manner, Hegel precedes Engels' 1876 findings in "The Part Played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man," that "labour created man himself!"[27] It is through labor that man becomes man.

Through the above reading, it is fair to suggest that Berki's argument that labor is just a passing and unimportant theme in Hegel is incorrect, and that the implausibility Berki ascribes to the development of the concept of labor in Marx being influenced by Hegel's shows itself to be perfectly plausible. Beyond this, contrary to Berki, Marx does not simply reduce and expand on Hegel's *geist* and self-activity by treating the former as man and the latter as labor. What Marx does is take what is largely implicit and unsystematized in Hegel's concept of labor and makes it explicit. In doing so, Marx gives himself the capacity of overcoming certain contradictions in Hegel's views on labor, and consequently takes the fundamental principles to their logical (and practical) conclusion – communism, where the realization of unalienated labor allows for the fullest expression of human freedom.

Marx Sublates Hegel

There are three central contradictions in Hegel's conceptualization of labor that Marx overcomes. Marx, like Hegel, recognizes that labor, i.e., man's conscious life-activity, is a process of *objectification* (Hegel uses *externalization*),

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25. Ibid., pp. 128.

26. Marx, Karl., and Engels, Frederick. *The German Ideology* (New York: International Publishers, 1993), 48.

27. Engels, Frederick. "The Part Played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man." In *Dialectics of Nature* (London: Wellred Books, 2012), 172. These findings are partially supported by the recent anthropological work of Stephen Jay Gould, but that is beyond the scope of this essay.

whereby man "duplicates himself… actively, in reality, and therefore he contemplates himself in a world that he has created."[28] Unlike Hegel, Marx also realizes that under certain conditions, viz., capitalist relations of production (although appearing in different forms under different class societies), this objectification of man's species life becomes alienated or estranged, i.e., the process by which the object is made, the natural (as in nature) and social relations intrinsic to this process, and the resulting object, break with their creator. This totalizing estrangement alienates man from his species being and "makes his life-activity, his essential being, a mere means to his existence."[29]The condition of estrangement is a de-humanizing form of existence.

The first contradiction in Hegel is not simply that he does not distinguish objectification from alienated or estranged objectification. Since, although not using the concept of objectification, his concept of *externalization* fits the same role. Instead, as can be observed in his *Philosophy of Right*, his contradiction lies in the justification he attempts to provide for the so-called "restricted period" of alienation present in waged labor.[30] Although Hegel recognizes "man's absolute unfitness for slavery" and the inalienable quality of one's "own private personality and the universal essence of [their] self-consciousness," i.e., what gets externalized in the object of labor, he nonetheless allows for the alienation of these insofar as it is not constitutive of the "whole of my time."[31] In essence, as long as my alienation is not a totalizing one, alienating myself momentarily is fair game. The problem with the distinction between a relative and absolute alienating of one's imprescriptible characteristics is that it, as C.J. Arthur notices, "breaks down when one considers the possibility (which is effectively realized in the case of modern wage-labour) that, through successive piecemeal alienations of the worker's time, his entire labour time is appropriated by others."[32]

The alienation of the worker's imprescriptible characteristics does not disappear when the worker clocks out and goes home. In estranging him from the conscious life-activity that makes him a species being, man is only free in

28. Marx. *Manuscripts*, 77.

29. Ibid. 76.

30. Hegel. *Philosophy of Right*, 54, 48, 52-3.

31. Ibid., 48.

32. Arthur, C.J. *Dialectics of Labour: Marx and his Relation to Hegel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 101.

his "animal functions – eating, drinking, procreating."[33] The effects of restricted alienation prove themselves to be unrestricted. The alienation the worker endures in their workday ripples into a totalizing life experience, i.e., it affects their whole *mode of being*.

Here is the pith of the first contradiction in Hegel: by not seeing how restricted (wage-slavery) and unrestricted (chattel-slavery) alienation both encompass the "whole of my time," he effectively can arrive at the contradictory position of rejecting one and justifying the other, while what he rejects in one and justifies in the other are one and the same thing.[34] Marx sublates this contradiction by capturing the all-encompassing role alienated labor plays in the workers life.[35]

The second contradiction consists in Hegel's acceptance of the capitalist-worker contract, which establishes the ability for this restricted alienation, as a 'free contract'. As Arthur states,

> *There is a contradiction implicit in his view of personal powers as, on the one hand, inward property of a free being, and, on the other hand, potentially alienable property held mediatedly as a 'thing'. If this second relation is realized in the alienation of labour, the will exists in contradiction with itself; for, in Hegel's general theory, the moment of alienation establishes the will as will through its reflection from the thing back into itself; in the contractual relation with another will, symmetrically mediated in the thing, it becomes identical with its other and both equally achieve objective recognition; but, since the thing here itself embodies the will, as we have seen, the alienating mediation presupposes an asymmetrical relationship at the same time, in which one will bends to the other, being thus 'refracted' rather than reflected, so to speak, in this alienation. This is nothing less than self-estrangement*.[36]

The 'free contract' established between the employer and the employee replicates the relationship Hegel formulates in the lord/bondsman dialectic. By recognizing the liberatory moment in the lord/bondsman dialectic when the

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33. Marx. *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, 74.

34. Hegel. *Philosophy of Right*, 54.

35. "Sublates" is here used in the Hegelian sense (*aufhebung*), which refers to the process through which something is negated, or canceled, in such a manner that the thing negated is lifted (Latin *sublatus* = to lift up) and preserved as a part in a higher reality.

36. Arthur. *Dialectics of Labour*, 102.

worker recognizes himself in his object, but then providing a justification for conditions which reinstate this relationship, albeit under the guise of a 'free contract', Hegel is virtually going, like a dog chasing his tail, in circles.[37] Since Marx recognizes that under alienated relations of objectification the worker's product confronts him as an "alien power," and subsequently, that this alien power "belongs to some other man", viz., "the capitalist, or whatever one chooses to call the master of labor," what is presupposed in this 'free-contract' is the asymmetrical relation of power that positions one as the master and the other as the laborer. [38] Thus, this second contradiction in Hegel, which like the first, is engendered by Hegel's apologetics of wage-slavery, is superseded in Marx's theory of labor.

The third contradiction in Hegel is in the fact that labor's liberation is retained within the sphere of consciousness. The material and conscious existence of the bondsman was dependent on the lord. Through labor, the bondsman recognizes himself as an independent self-consciousness and supersedes his condition as "immediate consciousness, or consciousness in the form of thinghood."[39] But, Hegel provides no conceptualization of liberation in the material realm. For him, liberation is liberation *qua* self-consciousness. Therefore, what follows the lord and bondsman section is stoicism and skepticism, as opposed to revolution. That is why, as Marx properly saw, for Hegel "all re-appropriation of the estranged objective essence appears, therefore, as a process of incorporation into self-consciousness."[40] But a mere conscious liberation is an incomplete liberation. Liberation only in consciousness amounts to little more than the awareness of one's enslavement, which, although serving as the precondition for the struggle for material liberation, it is in itself not liberation *in toto*. As Marx saw "the real estrangement of the life of man remains, and remains all the more, the more one is conscious of it as such."[41]

For Hegel, liberation remains in the realm of self-consciousness because, as Marx states, for him "the essence of man equals self-consciousness."[42] Given that Hegel himself sees labor as the precondition for self-consciousness, the move Marx makes towards seeing the essence of man as a *homo faber* is the

37. The shift from bondsman to worker here is intentional. Towards the end of the section, when Hegel starts to deal with the bondsman's recognition, he shifts towards calling him "worker".

38. Marx. *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, 80-81.

39. Hegel. *Phenomenology*, 115.

40. Marx. *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, 151.

41. Ibid., 123.

42. Ibid., 151.

natural conclusion that should follow from Hegel's theory of labor, even if Hegel himself does not follow it. For Marx, on the other hand, "the solution of theoretical riddles [problems of consciousness] is the task of practice and effected through practice."[43] *This conclusion is more Hegelian than Hegel's own idealist notion of liberation*. If, as I previously noted, for Hegel self-consciousness is unlocked through labor, in his theory of labor one has the theoretical basis for thinking of the problems of consciousness as inextricably linked to problems of praxis. Thus, when Marx affirms in *The German Ideology* that alienation can "only be abolished" when "men make a revolution," this is the natural conclusion that one should arrive at from Hegel's theory of labor.[44] *Marx, therefore, takes Hegel beyond Hegel, but all the while, fulfilling something that was already implicit in Hegel*.

Even though Marx loses the philosophic jargon of the *Paris Manuscripts* by the time he writes *The German Ideology*, it is indubitable that labor continues to play a central role in human life as the self-activity through which one distinguishes the species from other animals.[45] The conceptualization of labor as playing a defining role in the life of the species remains a constant throughout Marx's life. As late as 1875, eight years before his death, he affirms in the "Critique of the Gotha Program" that the "highest phase of communist society" solves the "antithesis between mental and physical labor" and creates the conditions whereby "labor has become not only a means of life but life's prime want."[46] But the liberation labor can bring about, through a working-class revolution, would not only represent a material and conscious transformation, but a sensual one as well. One's sensual relationship to the world would no longer engage with objects as reified and fetishized commodities; instead, one's senses would themselves come to experience objects as "the manifestation of the human world."[47] Thus, for Marx, the "moment of liberation" Hegel sees in work is extended beyond a liberation in consciousness into an all-encompassing material, conscious, and sensuous liberation.[48]

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43. Ibid., 122.
44. Marx, and Engels. *The German ideology*, 56.
45. In *The German Ideology* he now calls it self-activity, not life-activity as he did in the *Manuscripts of 1844*. Marx, and Engels. *The German ideology*, 42.
46. Marx. "Critique of the Gotha Program." In *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 531.
47. Marx. *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, 106.
48. Hegel. *The Philosophy of Right*, 128.

In Marx's sublation of the contradictions in Hegel's theory of labor one sees labor affirmed both as the starting point and defining characteristic of the human species, and as the activity that a fully emancipated human society has as its prime want. Hegel's *world-historic break* in the conceptualization of labor is, as Sayers would say, the essential context one should see Marx's theory of labor in.[49] In this sense, one can add to Lenin's famous dictum from his *Philosophical Notebooks*, which states that "it is impossible to completely understand Marx's *Capital*, and especially its first chapter, without having thoroughly studied and understood the whole of Hegel's *Logic*" and say that 'it is impossible to completely understand the philosophical assumptions behind Marx's *Capital*, the *ontology* of *Capital*, without having thoroughly studied Hegel's theory of labor.'[50]

49. Sayers. "The Concept of Labour: Marx and His Critics," 433.
50. Lenin, V. I. *Collected Works*: Volume 38. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976), 180.

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The Dialectical Interplay of Islam and Marxism-Leninism

Ali Sharif[1]

Modern financial and industrial capitalism have created economic conditions far removed from 7th-century Arabia. As a result, the contemporary Muslim world finds itself subject to the universalizing logic of capital accumulation. Monopoly capital and imperial militarism have encircled Muslim-majority societies and produced structural contradictions that neither medieval jurisprudence nor modern reformist "Islamic finance" has resolved. The Qur'an's categorical prohibitions of riba, its injunctions against hoarding wealth, and its command that riches not circulate only among the wealthy articulate an economic ethos fundamentally opposed to the accumulation regimes of Liberal capitalism.[2] These rulings cannot be instantiated in a context where domestic and imperial capital monopolize the commanding heights of production. This essay argues that a faithful Islamic ijtihad under

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2. *The Qur'an,* 2:275; 9:34; 59:7

modern conditions necessitates the integration of Marxist-Leninism and its scientific integrations of dialectical and historical materialism. *Ijtihad* constitutes the exercise of independent legal reasoning by Islamic scholarship to derive rulings on issues not directly addressed in the Quran or Sunnah. In context with the modern day political economy, this is done through the scientific utilization of dialectical and historical materialism as a means to effectively interpret and apply these divine principles. Indeed, several Islamic scholars, Sunni and Shia alike, have acknowledged the utility of dialectical and historical materialism in Islamic jurisprudence, but they have rarely undertaken a systematic reconciliation of its scientific method with Islam's metaphysical telos. This has left unresolved the question of how Marxist-Leninist categories can be sublated into a framework where revelation retains ontological primacy, a task to which this essay is dedicated.

The unity between these materialisms and the application of Sharia is a dialectical sublation. The scientific application of dialectical and historical materialism has provided the only historically proven framework through which political systems can substantially resist the 21st century order of global capitalism and imperialism. Islam, for its part, provides revelation, moral orientation, and the ultimate telos of human existence, and Marxism-Leninism provides the analytic science of contradictions, the method for discerning their development, and praxis for their revolutionary resolution. Islam retains ontological priority as the ground of meaning, while Marxism functions as the scientific instrument through which Islam's divine imperatives of justice, equity, and liberation are concretely realized in history. For example, the Qur'an commands fair weights and measures,[3] but in modern economies this principle requires statistical science, regulatory systems, and technologies of measurement to be realized at scale. Likewise, the Qur'anic prohibitions cannot be enforced by individual piety alone. These rulings demand structural instruments of planning and ownership of the sort that Marxist-Leninist political economy provides. To understand the content of divine imperatives as well as the form of their realization, the science of dialectical and historical materialism must be consciously sublated into Islamic ijtihad, so Marxism-Leninism may furnish the indispensable means of revelation's ends. This is how we unite ontology and method in a single revolutionary praxis.

Dialectics, History, and Revelation

3. *The Qur'an,* 11:85

Dialectical materialism is the science of understanding reality through the law of motion and contradiction. It holds that all worldly phenomena develop through the unity and struggle of opposites. Vladimir Ilyich Lenin explains that the validity of the principle of dialectics must be verified through the history of science. Across disciplines its universality is evident. In mathematics, the relation of plus and minus; in calculus, differentiation and integration; in mechanics, action and reaction; in physics, positive and negative charges; in chemistry, atomic combination and dissociation; and in social science, the class struggle.[4] Historical materialism applies this method to human society. It identifies the primary contradiction in human society as that between the economic base—the forces and relations of production—and the superstructure of law, politics, and ideology. In other words, *historical materialism* is the premise that the economic structure and its inherent contradictions (property relations, the organization of production, and class structure) constitutes the foundation and development of human society. Since survival requires a definite mode of producing and distributing the means of life, the organization of production and the social relations surrounding it constitute the foundation upon which every polity and society is built. Political ideologies may influence this base, but they cannot exist independently of it, nor can they persist once the underlying relations of production collapse. Since the contradictions of the economic base drive the development of society, one must seize and reorganize the relations of production themselves, rather than simply reforming politics, law, or ideology built upon those relations, in order to abolish exploitation and transform society. This is the scientific foundation and revolutionary strategy of Marxism-Leninism.

The status of dialectics is that of rigorous methodology. Friedrich Engels identified dialectics as "the science of the general laws of motion and development of nature, human society and thought."[5] The central premises of universal motion, contradiction, quantitative change, and qualitative rupture resonate with Qur'anic depictions of history as governed by immutable *sunan Allah*, or laws of God.[6] Historical materialism operationalizes this by situating social formations within determinate relations of production and revealing how contradictions within these relations compel transformation.

Lenin described dialectics as the living study of contradiction in the very essence of objects: "The identity of opposites is the recognition of the

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4. Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, *On the Question of Dialectics,* 1915
5. Friedrich Engels, *Anti-Dühring: Herr Eugen Dühring's Revolution in Science*, 1877
6. *The Qur'an,* 33:62

contradictory, mutually exclusive, opposite tendencies in all phenomena and processes of nature (including mind and society)."[7] In his works, he outlines four essential determinations of dialectical materialism: (1) the objectivity of external reality independent of consciousness; (2) the unity and struggle of opposites as the source of development; (3) the transformation of quantitative changes into qualitative leaps; and (4) the "negation of negation" as the law of historical advance.[8] In dialectics, the *negation of the negation* is a law of development where a thing is first negated and then, at a higher level, the negation itself is negated, which results in a new, qualitatively different synthesis of development that incorporates elements of both the original and the first negation. These laws find resonance in Islam. It must be understood that Islam presupposes and reaffirms Lenin's four determinations of dialectical materialism: (1) revelation affirms objective reality as immutable laws of God that exist independently of human will; (2) it universalizes the dialectic of opposites in creation itself through the declaration "And We created all things in pairs, so perhaps you would be mindful," it affirms the dialectical principle of the unity of opposites in grounding all truth in God's immutable law—"Exalted is He who created all pairs of what the earth grows, and from humans themselves, and from that which they do not know,"—and articulates a universal dialectic that is the struggle of man as the dialectic between heaven and earth; (3) it affirms qualitative rupture and transformation as the result of multiple quantitative changes, in urge that repeated acts of prayer, fast, charity, and patience accumulate until they transform the believer's very state of being, small sins corrode faith until a qualitative rupture occurs, and the fall of communities as the result of gradual corruption that eventually causes decisive collapse; and (4) it manifests the law of the negation of the negation by negating the distortions of Judaism and Christianity, preserving their essential truths, and sublating prior revelations into a higher synthesis that unites divine law and inner spirit.[9] Lenin's scientific codification of dialectics indeed parallels and expands upon the Qur'anic metaphysics of motion.

Thus, dialectical materialism's principle of the unity of opposites resonates profoundly with Islam's conception of man as simultaneously spirit and body, servant of God, and in the case of this work, an agent of history. The Qur'an depicts man as a dialectic of materiality and transcendence, created from earth

7. Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, *On the Question of Dialectics,* 1915
8. Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, *Conspectus of Hegel's book The Science of Logic,* 1914
9. *The Qur'an,* 35:43; 36:36; 51:49; 29:45; 83:14; 7:34; 5:48; 42:13

yet infused with divine spirit.[10] This duality is a productive tension that drives history. In Islam, man himself embodies the dialectic between heaven and earth. His material struggle for livelihood is inseparable from his spiritual striving for justice. He is the site where material necessity and transcendent purpose converge, and history is the arena in which this contradiction is struggled over and provisionally resolved. Revelation commands human beings to act, struggle, and transform conditions while mindful of divine purpose. The Qur'an repeatedly insists that God "does not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves," as such is history grounded in human agency.[11] Islam is therefore in many ways a material faith that insists on praxis. The essential acts of prayer, zakat, and jihad are forms of devotion, mechanisms for reorganizing social life, and ways of attending to the excesses of chaos, suffering, injustice, and ego that inevitably arise in the world of humanity. This makes Islam, like dialectical materialism, a philosophy and science of practice.

Epistemology, Practice, and Contradictions in the Muslim World

Islamic jurisprudence commands inquiry (*ijtihad*) as a perpetual obligation. *Ijtihad* is the process in Islam of deriving new rulings that address people's needs under changed conditions. Scholars must apply revelation to novel conditions. Shia philosopher Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr emphasized that ijtihad is a dynamic methodology that must incorporate advances in human knowledge to address emergent contradictions.[12] Al-Sadr rejected communism as a standalone worldview due to what he claimed as its denial of divine purpose and reduction of man to mere economic relations. However, it must be recalled that Marx and Engels never presented a positive distinction regarding communism's "ontology," least not a finished ideal, but only as a historical praxis of the proletariat to abolish the present order. Al-Sadr's reservations must also be situated in the Cold War context of his 1980 death, as since then, the scientific utility of dialectical materialism has proven indispensable for diagnosing contradictions. Contemporary models such as China's have since proven how Marxist-Leninist methods subordinated to higher moral telos can be reinterpreted and sublated within an Islamic framework. Iranian scholar Murtadha Mutahhari likewise argued that Islam's universality lies in its ability

10. *The Qur'an,* 15:29
11. *The Qur'an,* 13:11
12. Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, *Iqtisaduna (Our Economics)*, 1982

to provide ultimate meaning while encouraging Muslims to adopt any scientific method that uncovers the laws of reality.[13] To exclude dialectical materialism from ijtihad today is to disregard a science that most practically delineates and remedies the structural injustices of global capitalism.

The philosophy of Imam Ali in Abu Talib (a.s.) reinforces this conception of man as a dialectical being. For Imam Ali (a.s.), knowledge that is not embodied in struggle is not knowledge at all. He declares that "Knowledge is associated with action. Therefore, whoever knows should act [upon it] because knowledge calls for action. If there is a response, well and good; otherwise, it departs from him," in sensitivity of the gap between cognition and praxis in a manner that anticipates the science of practice.[14] He also repeatedly warned against reliance on miracles or fate as substitutes for responsibility, and that justice is established through human endeavor. Despite the history of divine intervention, this implies that history advances by man's decision to embody divine guidance in action. His reflections on governance likewise display this dialectical insight. In a letter 53 to Malik al-Ashtar, he instructs that rulers must balance opposites—the needs of rich and poor, strong and weak—in order to maintain justice.[15] This cites contradiction as the motor of ethical order. The philosophy of Imam Ali (a.s.) illustrates that Islam already contains a dialectical anthropology. Man's essence is realized in the struggle to reconcile the material and the spiritual, body and soul, heaven and earth, justice and power, and the imperfections inherent to worldly existence that forms material contradiction.

As with the philosophy of Imam Ali (a.s.), Dialectical materialism's epistemology of practice is the method by which revolutionaries must relate to the consciousness of the masses. Mao Tse-Tung's conception of the mass line operationalizes dialectics as political epistemology. "From the masses, to the masses" is itself the unity of opposites between spontaneity and leadership, empirical experience and scientific analysis.[16] The scattered insights of everyday people, such as complaints of corruption, wages, and imperial domination are raw, unprocessed contradictions. Revolutionary leadership must gather these fragments, analyze them through the dialectical method, and return them as synthesized political line capable of guiding struggle.[17] This is a

13. Murtadha Mutahhari, *Man and Universe,* 1970

14. Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib, Edited by Yasin T. Al-Jibouri, *Nahjul-Balagha (Peak of Eloquence),* 2009, 908

15. Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib, Edited by Yasin T. Al-Jibouri, *Nahjul-Balagha (Peak of Eloquence),* 2009, 791-800

16. Mao Tse-Tung, *Some Questions Concerning Methods of Leadership,* 1943

17. Mao Tse-Tung, *On Coalition Government,* 1945

scientific cycle of cognition. In this process subjective consciousness is constantly tested against objective material contradictions. For Muslim societies where communism is often perceived as foreign or irreligious, the mass line anchors the Marxist-Leninist method in the vocabulary of lived faith. The people's grievances against injustice can be returned in Qur'anic categories without diluting dialectical rigor. The epistemic structure of dialectical materialism ensures the mass line analysis is utilized with the consciousness of the *ummah*.

Mao's *On Practice* further insists that practice is the primary source and criterion of knowledge. Cognition, Mao argues, begins with sensory participation in production and struggle, advances through abstraction into concepts, and must return to practice for verification.[18] This is the epistemology of dialectics, i.e. the unity of perceptual knowledge and rational knowledge mediated by revolutionary transformation. Islam resonates here, for ijtihad is the application of revelation to new conditions tested against lived reality. Both traditions reject scholasticism severed from everyday life. The Qur'an itself ties knowledge to action by asking its reader, "Do you order righteousness of the people and forget yourselves while you recite the Scripture? Then will you not reason?"[19] Cognition and theory must be grounded in the confirmation of tested experience, especially in the mass line. Mao universalizes this as a scientific law. Ideas divorced from practice are illusions, and theories not tested by transformation are abstract metaphysics. For Muslims, the imperative is to embed dialectical analysis in the struggle of workers, peasants, and students against exploitation, thereby verifying their truth in the furnace of history.

Ayatullah Sayyid Mahmud Taleghani, in his *Society and Economics in Islam*, stressed that revelation assumes social struggle as constitutive of history. For Taleghani, justice is the outcome of confrontation between oppressor and oppressed.[20] This is dialectics in Islamic vocabulary. Ali Shariati expanded upon this by arguing that the theological monotheism of *tawhid* must be understood as the socio-historical negation of hierarchy, for to affirm the Oneness of God is to negate all forms of domination, including class.[21] The Qur'anic dialectic between *mustad'afin* (oppressed) and *mustakbirin* (arrogant) is materially analogous to Marx's proletariat-bourgeoisie contradiction. Here Lenin's insistence on the "unity and struggle of opposites" is particularly

18. Mao Tse-Tung, *On Practice,* 1937
19. *The Qur'an,* 103:3
20. Ayatullah Sayyid Mahmud Taleghani, Society and Economics in Islam, 1978
21. Ali Shariati, *On the Sociology of Islam,* 1979

salient. For Islam, the opposition between *mustad'afin* and *mustakbirin* is materially real. The Qur'an describes the Pharaoh as the archetype of arrogant oppression and promises a historical trajectory with which the oppressed will inherit the earth.[22] Dialectical materialism provides the conceptual rigor to treat this opposition as historically operative law. The contradiction between labor and capital, colonizer and colonized, rich and poor, functions as the empirical instantiation of the Qur'anic dialectic. In this way, the "science of contradictions" is a tool for Sharia to intervene concretely.

The persistence of sectarianism in the Muslim world demonstrates the need for this dialectical analysis of contradictions. Mao distinguished between principal and secondary contradictions, as well as antagonistic and non-antagonistic forms.[23] Sectarianism, when absolutized, is treated as the principal contradiction between Muslims, yet historical materialism reveals it as a secondary contradiction arising from deeper structures of uneven development, ruling-class manipulation of religious identity, and in the modern day, imperialist domination. The early division between Sunni and Shia after Karbala was fundamentally a struggle over political legitimacy and the organization of authority in the ummah. What was represented as theological divergence was in fact the surface form of deeper contradictions, be they the centralization of wealth in the Umayyad state, the monopolization of power by a dynastic elite, or the marginalization of the prophetic family.

In the modern era, imperialism has repeatedly instrumentalized sectarian identity as a political technology of rule. British colonial authorities in Iraq and India codified sectarian categories in law and administration. This exacerbated divisions to secure domination. More recently, the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the subsequent policy of sectarian quotas entrenched confessionalism as the structuring principle of the new state. This fragmented class unity and later facilitated resource extraction. In Lebanon, the confessional political system has functioned to preserve a ruling bloc of elites who monopolize banking, land, and external patronage. The Yemeni conflict is narrated in terms of Zaydi Shia Houthis versus a Sunni coalition, yet its motor force lies in class exploitation, imperial resource extraction, and geopolitical rivalry. Yemen's underdevelopment has been exacerbated by Liberal restructuring and Saudi hegemony. Sectarian discourse was superimposed to fracture solidarity and legitimize foreign intervention, yet the material contradiction remains one of

22. *The Qur'an,* 28:4-5
23. Mao Tse-Tung, *On Contradiction,* 1937

dependency and sovereignty. Similarly, contemporary divisions over Palestine utilize religious and sectarian discourse as a result of their integration into imperial accumulation. States that normalize with Israel, such as the UAE, Bahrain, and increasingly Saudi Arabia, present their policy as pragmatic realism to justify repressing popular identification with the Palestinian cause. Here again, the contradiction is not between "moderate" and "radical" Islam but between comprador regimes aligned with U.S.-Israeli hegemony and the masses of the ummah committed to resisting dispossession. In all of these cases, sectarianism has intensified as a secondary contradiction based on the primary contradiction of economic and political strategies of domination.

In Leninist terms, sectarian division is a "false appearance" of class antagonism displaced onto confessional lines. The Qur'an condemns *fitna*—discord fostered by tyrants—as a tool of domination.[24] A dialectical approach therefore situates sectarianism as a contradiction internal to the people that can be transformed through political education and mass struggle rather than reified as the central conflict. The mass line operationalizes this. Revolutionaries must analyze sectarian grievances as products of class exploitation and foreign intervention, and return them in a form that unites rather than divides.

Yet appearances do not dissolve at once merely by unveiling their essence, so this transformation of sectarianism must be conceived as protracted. The "false appearance" of antagonism indeed becomes sedimented in consciousness, institutions, and everyday life, and reproduced through centuries of theological polemic, state-building projects, and colonial manipulation. The superstructural distortion thus reproduced a relative autonomy persisting as an inherited form that mediates how the real class antagonism is experienced. In Islamic terms, the condemnation of *fitna* acknowledges that injustice entrenched in consciousness and social practice cannot be abolished by decree, but requires long processes of *tazkiyah* (purification) and collective jihad. As such, sectarianism must be negated concretely through patient work and material results. Mao's theory of the mass line makes clear that the revolutionary must begin from the raw, partial, and often distorted grievances of the people, and return them in a synthesized form that reveals their real essence. This dialectical mediation between the immediate and the essential takes time, because the unity of opposites is constantly reconstituted in new conditions. Dialectical materialism exposes sectarianism as a superstructural diversion, while Islam provides the moral imperative to transcend it in the name of ummah,

24. *The Qur'an,* 2:191

Capitalism produces precisely the corruption and sin the Qur'an condemns including commodification of life, concentration of wealth, and exploitation of labor. Lenin's analysis of imperialism and monopoly capitalism clarifies why Muslim societies have been subordinated through coups, structural adjustment, and resource plunder.[25] Muslim-majority societies have been forced into circuits of global accumulation that reproduce immiseration. Islamic finance, which was presented as an alternative, has been structurally absorbed into capitalism by benchmarking profits to LIBOR and reproducing disguised interest. It has objectively replicated riba under legalistic guise and loopholes that bypass Qur'anic prohibitions. Thus, non-Marxist applications of Sharia have failed to arrest capitalism's contradictions.

As the world's largest exporter of oil, Saudi Arabia has concentrated immense wealth into the hands of a ruling family. Millions of migrant workers labor under the kafala system, an institutionalized form of bondage that confiscates passports, withholds wages, and commodifies human beings. Qur'anic injunctions against enslavement and exploitation are directly violated,[26] yet clerical justifications render this system "Islamic" by appealing to contractual wealth, and expanded debt immensely. The quantitative deprivation and incremental cuts in food and fuel culminated in qualitative rupture with the bread riots of 1977 and the uprisings of 2011. Historical materialism reveals this as structural necessity. As it is integrated deeply into the apparati of global capital, the Saudi monarchy requires a super-exploited labor force to sustain petro-capitalist accumulation. Only a dialectical analysis explains why Islamic morality is continually subordinated to class interest. Similarly, Egypt under Sadat, Mubarak, and al-Sisi demonstrates this law of quantitative-to-qualitative transformation. Decades of IMF structural adjustment gradually eroded subsidies, privatized industries, developed obscene disparities of Lenin's principle that small, imperceptible quantitative changes prepare the ground for leaps mirrors this. Material contradictions reached a threshold where spontaneous mass mobilization became inevitable. For Muslims, the Qur'an's assurance that "God does not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves" here aligns with dialectical necessity.[27] Contradictions compel transformation once material conditions mature.

Iran provides one of the most illustrative dialectical cases. The Shah's regime represented the disruption of imperial monopoly capital and exploitation by

25. Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism,* 1917
26. *The Qur'an,* 90:13
27. *The Qur'an,* 13:11

domestic capitalist elites. Shariati's discourse of *mustad'afīn* versus *mustakbirīn* translated Marxist class categories into Qur'anic language. The Islamic revolution in 1979 was a qualitative rupture precipitated by contradictions between oil wealth and mass poverty, Westernization and Islamic identity, and between monarchy and republican aspiration. Khomeini's mobilization of clerics and masses created a revolutionary bloc that overthrew the U.S.-backed Shah. Yet the subsequent purging of Marxist allies and partial reintegration of capitalist relations produced a new elite that now undermines the revolution's aims. Thus the process showed the danger of the "negation of the negation." The revolution negated the Shah but failed to negate capital. Contradictions reemerged in new form and produced today's oligarchic structures that restrict Iran's revolutionary sovereignty. Lenin's insistence that every negation is partial until the exploiting class itself is abolished explains this relapse. Historical evidence makes objective that abandoning class struggle leads to relapse into contradiction. The lesson is that Islam and Marxism-Leninism must remain dialectically by revelation supplying telos and Marxism supplying method. To divorce them is to recreate inequality under Islamic cover.

Marx's theory of surplus value parallels Islamic prohibitions against exploitative gain. Capitalist profit arises from the expropriation of labor-time, that is the portion of value created but unpaid. The Qur'an's prohibition of riba rejects precisely profit without labor or risk-sharing. Al-Sadr articulated that wealth must derive from productive activity or risk-bearing partnerships such as *musharakah* and *mudarabah* rather than passive accumulation.[28] Indeed, the structural convergence between Sharia and Marxism is that both reject unearned accumulation.

The condemnation of hoarding also parallels Marx's critique of capital accumulation. Zakat and khums institutionalize redistribution and ensure circulation of wealth. Yet under conditions where a billionaire controls billions while millions lack food, 2.5% charity becomes structurally irrelevant. Marxist redistribution, as in the Soviet collectivization of bourgeois wealth into productive infrastructure, reflects the Qur'anic injunction that riches must not stagnate in elite hands. Without revolutionary restructuring of ownership, Islamic charity is overwhelmed by the scale of capitalism. Here we see Lenin's point that dialectics is the doctrine of development in its full depth. Charity under capitalism is trapped in the surface form of redistribution, but dialectical

28. Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, *Iqtisaduna (Our Economics)*, 1982

analysis interrogates this notion more deeply. Why does hoarding persist despite piety? Because modern, industrial, and globalized relations of production more easily compel accumulation. Islam diagnoses hoarding as sin and Marxism explains its structural inevitability under modern capitalism. In dialogue, they reveal both the moral and material dimensions of injustice.

Mao insists that contradictions are universal and particular, that development is driven by the struggle of opposites, and that every social formation has a principal contradiction that determines its trajectory. For Muslim societies today, the principal contradiction is that between imperialist monopoly capital and the broad masses seeking justice. Secondary contradictions between Sunni and Shia, secular and religious, and reformist and revolutionary must be analyzed in relation to this dominant axis. This methodological particularity prevents both dogmatism and opportunism . Islam resonates here. Qur'anic narratives constantly distinguish between central struggle, such as with Moses and Pharaoh, and subsidiary disputes among the people. Mao's emphasis on the transformation of the principal contradiction as the key to social change offers revolutionary *ijtihad* a scientific clarity. Unless the base contradiction of imperialism and exploitation is resolved, Islamic injunctions on justice, redistribution, and unity will remain suspended in abstraction. With this clarity, Muslims can distinguish the decisive from the secondary, the essential from the incidental, and orient their struggle toward emancipation.

Obedience in Islam is conditional. The Qur'an commands loyalty to authority only "in what is right,"[29] and repeatedly sanctions struggle against tyranny. For Shariati, Islam is a revolutionary tradition of perpetual struggle, whose original emergence in Mecca represented a rupture against the Quraysh oligarchy.[30] Mutahhari similarly emphasized that the Qur'anic paradigm of history positions oppression and resistance as the constitutive motor of human development. [31] The materiality of Islam is further evident in its historical unfolding. The hijrah of Prophet Muhamad (a.s.) to Medina was a strategic migration that created new social relations, which united migrants and helpers into a class-like solidarity against Qurayshi oligarchy. Similarly, the Battle of Badr is remembered in-part for the discipline, unity, and moral resolve of a materially outnumbered force in dialogue with supernatural intervention. Karbala as well illustrates this. Imam Husayn (a.s.) consciously sacrificed himself to expose the tyranny of Yazid and transform history by his own praxis.

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29. *The Qur'an,* 4:59
30. Ali Shariati, *On the Sociology of Islam,* 1979
31. Murtadha Mutahhari, *Man and Universe,* 1970

Islam sanctifies human agency within divine purpose and a dialectical structure that directly parallels historical materialism's insistence that men make their own history under given conditions. On the insistence of practice, The martyrdom of Imam Husayn (a.s.) in Karbala in 680 CE represented a dialectical moment of world-historical significance. In Marxist terms, Karbala is the qualitative transformation precipitated by accumulated contradictions in Umayyad rule, such as dynastic monarchy, wealth concentration, and corruption, negated through Husayn's sacrifice. Karbala functions as the perpetual archetype of revolutionary consciousness. Husayn is the vanguard who unmasks tyranny and compels the oppressed to recognize their agency. The martyrdom of Imam Husayn (a.s.) is understood as the material logos of Shi'ism and the base of permanent consciousness of resistance. The refusal of Imam Husayn (a.s.) to submit to tyranny negated Yazid's sovereignty and inscribed into Shia memory the necessity of struggle regardless of immediate victory. Karbala thus functions as the historical-materialist template for Islamic revolution. The oppressed achieve consciousness through sacrifice and compel future ruptures against tyranny.

A dialectical reading of Karbala reveals all four of Lenin's laws at work. The unity of opposites manifests in the confrontation between Husayn's minority and Yazid's imperial majority. Quantitative change, as in the steady corruption and dynastic centralization of the Umayyads, culminated in the qualitative leap of Karbala. The negation of negation occurs as each generation reactivates Karbala, as the sacrifice is continuously re-appropriated today as anti-imperialist and revolutionary energy. Finally, objectivity is affirmed in that Husayn's stand was but materially embedded in relations of power, wealth, and legitimacy. That this sacrifice continues to materialize through historical development is evident nearly fifteen centuries later. The most effective anti-imperialist and resistance axis in the contemporary Middle East derives its cohesion and legitimacy precisely and explicitly through Husayn's name. Despite Yazid's contemporaries dismissing Husayn's sacrifice as idealist and impractical, his martyrdom revealed itself in the longue durée of historical materialism, as the condition of possibility for enduring revolutionary subjectivity. For Shia thought, this renders Karbala as a dialectical science of rupture. The act that appeared as "pure negation" proved materially necessary and inscribed into the very structure of Shia political theology the principle that revolutionary agency is constituted through sacrifice. This demonstrates that the dialectic of Karbala was never confined to its immediate conjuncture. Rather, it established a transhistorical trajectory wherein revelation and history

continually generate anti-imperialist praxis under new conditions. Precisely here is the scientific utility of dialectical and historical materialism for modern Islam. It provides the categories to recognize Husayn's as a necessary rupture that transforms history. What appears "impractical" within the logic of an oppressive present may, through contradiction and negation, become the precondition of future emancipation. The utilities of dialectical and historical materialism allow present-day Muslims to discern the strategic necessity hidden beneath apparent defeat and to structure resistance accordingly in the modern world. This explains why Shariati referred to Husayn as an eternal archetype of protest and Mutahhari as the embodiment of revolutionary ijtihad. The event's universality lies in its historical materialism. Every system that monopolizes wealth, suppresses dissent, and cloaks domination in legitimacy will eventually confront its Husayn. The Qur'an's law that "falsehood is bound to perish" corresponds directly to Lenin's assertion that contradictions are irrepressible.[32] Small quantitative instances of repression only grow more intense until rupture occurs.

Revolutionary Synthesis of Islam and Marxism-Leninism

The monotheism of *tawhid* is the negation of social stratification. If God is One, no hierarchy among men can be ontologically justified. Taleghani extended this principle to the economic sphere. Concentration of wealth in private monopolies violates tawhid as much as polytheism does, for it institutes rival centers of sovereignty.[33] This echoes Marx's critique of alienation. Capital becomes the "independent power" that dominates man.[34] Tawhid demands its abolition. Our previous study of Lenin deduces that development occurs because each side of a contradiction contains the other within itself. Capital depends on labor yet dominates it, and Yazid depended on Husayn's legitimacy yet sought to annihilate him. In Islamic terms, all false gods (*taghut*) parasitically rely on the very truth they suppress. This means that the victory of *tawhid* is historically inevitable once the contradiction matures. Islam universalizes Lenin's insight. Every idol collapses under the weight of its own dependence on the truth it denies.

Islamic critics often reject dialectical materialism for "reducing reality to matter" and denying divine agency. This rests on a category error. Historical

32. *The Qur'an,* 17:81
33. Ayatullah Sayyid Mahmud Taleghani, *Society and Economics in Islam,* 1978
34. Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume I,* 1867, 449

materialism, as Engels clarified, does not deny ideals or spirit, but demonstrates that human consciousness is shaped in determinate relation to material life.[35] For Islam, revelation supplies meaning and ultimate truth, while material analysis diagnoses worldly contradictions. To treat dialectical materialism as a science that it is, rather than a philosophy it is not, helps us resolve the tension and delineates injustice so that Sharia can correct it. Several Islamic philosophers anticipate this reconciliation. Mulla Sadra's doctrine of *substantial motion* posits that existence itself is in ceaseless flux and undergoing inner transformation until it reaches higher realities. Lenin asserts that dialectics is "the doctrine of development in its fullest, deepest and most comprehensive form."[36] Sadra saw motion culminating in nearness to God and Lenin saw motion culminating in qualitative rupture. The difference here is telos. Islam provides transcendence, and dialectical materialism provides immanence. Together, they form a comprehensive ontology of change.

Marx's oft-quoted line that "man is the highest essence for man" is misconstrued as atheistic negation.[37] Shariati himself notes that Marx's true enemy was alienation, not God.[38] In context, Marx was criticizing speculative philosophy that estranged man from his essence. To distinguish between religion and philosophy is to understand the former as a lived relation to the divine through the material, and the latter as speculation which expounds this relation into abstraction. Islam resolves this ambiguity. If man's essence is to be God's *khalifah,* not merely a species-being but a vicegerent and successive authority,[39] then devotion to humanity is devotion to God. In this case the dialectic of alienation and essence is expanded upon. Islam sees man reclaiming his divine vocation from the idols of capital and empire.

Another misconception is that Marxism abolishes all property. In fact, Marx's critique of capitalist private property converges with Sharia's ban on wealth-hoarding almost seamlessly. As multiple Marxist scholars clarified, what is abolished is the stratified private ownership of the means of production, not personal ownership or partnership in possessions, enterprise, and trade. This aligns with the multi-sectarian hadith declaring that people are partners in water, pastures, and fire, i.e. essentials of water, agriculture, and energy belong to all. Baqir al-Sadr drew the distinction that Islam forbids monopolization of

35. Frederich Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific,* 1880
36. Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, *The Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism,* 1913
37. Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right,* 1843
38. Ali Shariati, *On the Sociology of Islam,* 1979
39. *The Qur'an,* 2:30

communal resources but protects personal property.[40] Here again Lenin's dialectics clarify the matter. Property in capitalism is a contradictory category. It is both personal possession *and* a social relation. By converting tools into capital, personal property negates itself and becomes alien property that dominates its owner. Lenin notes that the dialectical method reveals such transformations. Islam already prohibits this inversion through zakat, khums, and bans on monopolization. Thus Marxist analysis shows how property's inner contradictions unfold. Sharia provides the normative injunctions that prevent those contradictions from metastasizing into exploitation.

Some Muslims argue that oppression must be endured until the Mahdi's return. Yet Qur'an affirms that "Allah will not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves."[41] Passive fatalism contradicts Islam's ethic of action. Mutahhari denounced such quietism as betrayal of Islam's revolutionary essence. The uprising of Imam Husayn (a.s.) proves that awaiting divine justice requires human agency. As Khomeini later insisted, the Mahdi will not come unless we prepare the ground.[42] Dialectical materialism operationalizes this principle. Contradictions compel struggle, and revolution is the precondition of justice. In Leninist terms, this is the "role of the subjective factor." Objective contradictions accelerate, but without organized struggle they do not resolve themselves. Islam insists on the same. Prayer without action is hypocrisy.[43] To invoke the Mahdi without resisting oppression is to deny the dialectic itself. Historical materialism provides Muslims with a science of preparation by diagnosing when contradictions reach maturity, when quantitative change tips into qualitative rupture, and vanguard action can transform potential into actuality. Far from undermining eschatology, it equips believers to participate in it responsibly.

Marx held that no mode of production is transcended until the productive forces it has generated become incompatible with existing relations.[44] Contemporary capitalism has developed unprecedented productive capacities in automation, global industry, and digital networks, but subordinated them to private accumulation. Islam demands that wealth circulate justly and that resources be deployed for the collective good. This can only occur when productive forces are liberated from capitalist relations. Mutahhari emphasized that Islam

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40. Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, *Iqtisaduna (Our Economics)*, 1982
41. *The Qur'an,* 13:11
42. Ruhollah Khomeini, *Sahifeh-ye Imam*, vol. 18, 1999
43. *The Qur'an ,* 61:2-3
44. Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy,* 1859

requires the cultivation of production to secure human welfare.[45] Taleghani saw industrial development as necessary to realize Qur'anic justice in modernity.[46] Marxism-Leninism uniquely provides a model for reorganizing production through planned development, incentivizing innovation through personal gain, and subordinating economic growth to collective need. To ignore this necessity is to condemn Muslim societies to dependency, underdevelopment, and violation of Sharia's socio-economic imperatives. Lenin insisted that the development of productive forces inevitably collides with the relations of production that bind them. Quantitative improvements in machinery, organization, and technique eventually burst the integuments of private property which forces qualitative reorganization. For Muslim societies, this means that merely applying zakat or Islamic banking within capitalist structures is insufficient and sinful. The productive forces of oil, digital industry, and finance are bound within imperialist property relations. Only revolutionary rupture toward planned development and democratic control of utilization can align them with Qur'anic justice.

Consider the Gulf monarchies. Trillions in oil revenues exist, yet mass unemployment among youth, ecological devastation, and dependence on Western arms contracts persist. This is due to the contradiction between global productive capacity and rentier-monarchical relations. Islam demands that wealth serve the *ummah*; dialectical materialism shows why rentier states cannot deliver it. Similarly, in Pakistan, agricultural productivity is fettered by feudal land monopolies. The Qur'an condemns hoarding land and water, yet redistribution never occurs because landed elites dominate the state. Here the Leninist lesson of "smashing the bourgeois state" applies. Without revolutionary reorganization, productive forces stagnate.

Lenin emphasizes that the state is an organ of class domination, and that no amount of reform can reconcile capitalist states with the interests of the oppressed.[47] This is directly applicable to the Muslim world. The postcolonial regimes have largely served comprador elites of global finance. To apply Sharia under such structures is impossible. The state itself reproduces exploitation. Marxism-Leninism prescribes revolutionary seizure of state power by a disciplined vanguard, expropriation of the bourgeoisie, and reorganization of production under collective ownership. This mirrors the Prophet's own consolidation in Medina where authority was centralized to abolish Quraysh

45. Murtadha Mutahhari, *Man and Universe,* 1970
46. Ayatullah Sayyid Mahmud Taleghani, *Society and Economics in Islam,* 1978
47. Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, *The State and Revolution,* 1917

oligarchy and redistribute wealth. The apparent authoritarianism is suppression of the exploiting class, consistent with Sharia's mandate to break monopolies of wealth and power. The failures of "Islamic democracy" in places like Egypt after 2011 confirm this analysis. The Muslim Brotherhood sought to implement social reforms within the Liberal state apparatus. The result was austerity, IMF dependency, and eventual military coup. The state itself embodied the class power of the Egyptian bourgeoisie and imperial finance. Without combating this apparatus, Sharia's principles of justice could never be realized. Lenin's insistence that the bourgeois state must be overthrown, not reformed, is thus indispensable to Islamic revolutionary praxis.

The 1979 Iranian Revolution initially embodied this synthesis. Shariati's discourse of *mustad'afīn* versus *mustakbirīn* translated Marxist class categories into Qur'anic language. Khomeini's mobilization of clerics and masses created a revolutionary bloc that overthrew the U.S.-backed Shah. Yet the subsequent purging of Marxist allies and partial reintegration of capitalist relations produced a new elite that now undermines the revolution's aims. Historical evidence makes objective that abandoning class struggle leads to relapse into contradiction. The lesson is that Islam and Marxism-Leninism must remain dialectically by revelation supplying telos and Marxism supplying method. To divorce them is to recreate inequality under Islamic cover. Lebanon illustrates this relapse in another form. Despite deep Shia traditions of resistance, Hezbollah has been forced into a contradictory position of simultaneously resisting imperialism militarily while operating within a Liberal economic system that immiserates its own base and creates domestic resentment. Without a Marxist economic program, all resistance risks becoming partial and confined to geopolitics while leaving intact the class structures that reproduce its need. Historical materialism clarifies that resistance must extend from the battlefield to the workplace, and from anti-imperial struggle to class struggle.

Imam Husayn's stand is a perpetual imperative. The contradiction between tyranny and justice repeats historically. Every age has its Yazid and every generation its Husayn. Dialectical materialism provides the scientific grammar for this repetition. Contradictions reappear in new forms until negated by struggle. Husayn's death universalizes this dialectic. It is humanity's existential dialectic between heaven and earth, between divine purpose and worldly injustice. The scientific dialectic of Marxism gains transcendent dimension when anchored in this Islamic framework. This universality also extends to ecological struggle. Today's Muslim societies face climate catastrophe, including desertification, floods, and rising heat. The Qur'an condemns *fasād*

fi'l-ard, or corruption on earth,[48] while dialectical materialism identifies the structural driver that is capital's endless accumulation and short-term imperatives. Here again the contradiction is clear. Productive forces capable of renewable energy exist, yet relations of fossil-capital fetter them. Islam names this sin, Marxism names it exploitation, Lenin names it imperialism. Only their integration can produce the rupture necessary for survival.

Conclusion

To reconcile Islam and Marxism is to recognize their dialectical relation. Islam provides ultimate orientation, with man as khalifah, justice as divine imperative, and worship as telos. Marxism-Leninism helps map the contradictions, identify class structure, and organize revolutionary praxis. Just as astronomy is used to calculate prayer times, dialectical materialism is used to diagnose injustice without supplanting divine truth. Historical materialism explains how societies move, and Islam explains why and toward what end. Marxism clarifies the mechanisms of exploitation and Islam provides the moral compass to prevent revolution from degenerating into arbitrary power. Communism supplies structures to prevent hoarding and commodification and Sharia ensures that redistribution is guided by mercy, worship, and transcendence. As Baqir al-Sadr wrote, "Division of labour leads to greater production output. This fact has been discovered by economic science and has been employed by producers to increase and improve production output. The role of the science of economics in relation to production is therefore to reveal those laws, which enable the producer to organize the objective aspect of the production operation in a way that leads to an optimum result as to the quantity and quality of production output," thus Islamic economics aims to liberate man from domination but requires scientific organization of production to succeed.[49]

Both traditions are animated by defense of the oppressed. Marxism demands the abolition of exploitation and Islam insists on siding with the mustad'afīn against the mustakbirīn (28:5). Taleghani described Islam as a perpetual struggle to lift the yoke from the shoulders of the downtrodden.[50] Lenin's insistence that revolution must smash the bourgeois state converges with the Qur'anic imperative to shatter tyranny. The synthesis universalizes concern for

48. *The Qur'an,* 2:11
49. Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, *Iqtisaduna (Our Economics)*, 1982
50. Ayatullah Sayyid Mahmud Taleghani, *Society and Economics in Islam,* 1978

the oppressed into both temporal and spiritual registers. The framework of principal and secondary contradictions reinforces that sectarian and theological disputes cannot be mistaken for the decisive antagonism, which lies in conflict of opposing classes. Islam universalizes this recognition by condemning *fitna* and insisting on unity against injustice, while dialectical materialism provides the analytic precision to distinguish which contradictions must be struggled through and which can be transformed without antagonism.

The Muslim world therefore stands at a decisive juncture. It confronts both the universal contradictions of global capital and the particular crises of postcolonial states such as youth unemployment, patriarchal authoritarianism, ecological collapse, and sectarian fragmentation. None of these can be resolved within liberal reformism or clerical quietism. Only by integrating Marxism-Leninism's science of dialectics with Islam's revelation of telos can a revolutionary ijtihad emerge capable of liberating productive forces, abolishing exploitation, and reorienting society toward God's justice. Imam Ali (a.s.) emphasizes this necessity. Knowledge without action departs toward alienation, justice is the foundation upon which the material world stands, and rulers must balance opposites to secure equity. Truth must be verified in struggle, and God does not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves. This is not to be mistaken for syncretism. It is Islam that retains ontological primacy, Marxism-Leninism that supplies practical methods, and their unity that creates the possibility of emancipated life. Dialectical materialism is the scientific tool to map the pre-existing contradictions. Muslims, through ijtihad, must integrate this science to fulfill their socio-economic imperatives. Only through such a revolutionary ijtihad can Muslim societies liberate productive forces from capitalist monopolies, redistribute wealth justly, and align social order with Sharia. Islam without Marxism risks co-optation into capitalist facade, and Marxism without Islam risks nihilism. The necessity is clear. In context with the modern-day global economy, the Muslim world requires Marxism-Leninism as the instrument by which divine principles are historically realized. Anything less is resignation to tyranny.

5

What is fascism?

Sjoerd de Groot[1]

Fascism is an elusive concept. It is commonly used as an insult for politics one dislikes. Most definitions do not address the nature of fascism, but the presentation of it. The most concise definition was given by Georgi Dimitrov in 1935: *"the open terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary, most chauvinistic and most imperialist elements of finance capital."*

Fascism is neither an ideology nor an economic system; it is a tool created for the purpose of defending the interests of a specific fraction of capital - finance capital - from threats to its economic dominance. In this sense, fascism is the opposite side of the same coin to liberalism. In the absence of systemic threats, liberalism serves finance capital the best, but as threats arise or intensify, fascism is the tool used to the same end; fascism explicitly tries to achieve what liberalism tries to achieve covertly. Therefore, there is no such thing as "covert fascism". By its very definition, fascism is overt.

Finance capital - the fraction of capital that is in the business of creating credit rather than creating commodities, which is the business of industrial capital, or circulating commodities, which is the business of commercial capital - is not only the originator of fascism, but also of imperialism. This should inform both

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our understanding of the relationship between fascism and imperialism, and the evolution of fascism historically.

Since fascism as a political tool of finance capital arises in crisis, it should be seen as reactive in nature. Therefore, classical colonialism is not inherently fascist, but a colonialist occupation will turn into a fascist system as it seeks to suppress political action of any kind for national liberation, given that the occupation in question is of particular importance to finance capital.

Fascism arose first in Italy in the 1920s and next across the industrialized world throughout the 1930s. Winston Churchill praised the efforts of Benito Mussolini in crushing the militant workers' movement. Likewise, German bankers and industrialists, British, and American business interests all gladly supported Hitler's rise to power. German finance capital was threatened by an economic crisis of overproduction and a political crisis of worker's revolution. Hitler restarted profit accumulation at the expense of living standards briefly, but only for a couple of years, after which war became an economic necessity. It was only at this stage that the other imperialist powers truly turned against Nazi Germany.

The practice of fascism is remarkably close to the practice of colonialism. British colonial practices and racial segregation in the southern states of the US actually served as guiding examples for Nazi Germany in constructing its repressive apparatus. After World War II, the exploitation of the global periphery through debt bondage intensified, but so did the threat of (communist-led) anticolonial revolution. The main threat to finance capital no longer originated from militant workers' movements in the industrialized imperialist countries, but in the global periphery that was increasingly becoming the most important source of profits for finance capital. As a result, the form of fascism evolved as well, but remained a weapon of finance capital. One could say that the repressive apparatus of colonialism was brought to the home countries in the 1930s, adapted into what we call fascism, and then exported back into the (former) colonies.

The Cold War saw the rise of fascist regimes in non-industrialized countries such as South Korea, the Republic of China on the island of Taiwan, Indonesia, South Vietnam, Cuba, Argentina, Chile, and Paraguay, to name only a few. All these regimes were brought to power with the full support of the US in the face of socialist or socialist-aligned popular movements which formed a direct threat against the interests of finance capital. Widespread violent repression of

union organizing, leftist parties, using detention, torture and even mass slaughter was present in all those regimes for this purpose. In some of these countries, liberal democracies existed beforehand, but the liberal political system no longer facilitated the effective subjugation of the working class. Of course, all of these repressive policies were combined with economic policies which made the countries more open to Western capital penetration.

As the USSR was destroyed and the socialist challenge to the interests of finance capital subsided across the world, the fascist systems were dismantled and replaced with liberal democratic systems again. Fascism was no longer needed to keep these countries suitable for capital accumulation. With the militant socialist forces mostly dismantled and replaced by nominally socialist governments which followed pro-capital neoliberal policies, there was no longer a need for fascist systems; only some fascist policies remained, such as the National Security Law in South Korea, criminalizing the expression of sympathetic views toward the DPRK.

Meanwhile, other threats to finance capital have arisen. These threats in many cases no longer come from ideologically socialist or left forces, but from political movements based on economic nationalism. This comes in the form of the nationalization of natural resources of governments such as the national conservative Russian government, the Shia revolutionary Iranian government or the Bolivarian socialist Venezuelan and Bolivian governments.

To push back against these forces and regain access to those natural resources, violent gangs and far right political forces were used to unsuccessfully overthrow the Venezuelan government and successfully overthrow the Bolivian government. For a year, Bolivia was ruled by a violent, pro-capital military dictatorship. Similar forces were used in Russia and Iran, but those societies have proven too united and too stable for these forces to take root.

Instead, proxy regimes are used to attack Russia and Iran. Both Ukraine and the Zionist entity known as Israel are repressive military regimes which engage in hard-handed repression of the most militant anticapitalist, anti-imperialist and anti-Western populations within the territories they control; the communist PFLP is one of the main resistance groups in Palestine and Communist Party militants were a leading component in the Donbas people’s struggles. Both the native populations of Palestine and of the Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics have been subjected to kidnappings, extrajudicial detention, torture, extrajudicial executions and military assault by the Zionist- and Kiev regimes.

Additionally, Israel serves the dual purpose of preventing the unification of the Arab world by being a wedge in its heart. The balkanization of the Arab world keeps it both exploitable by finance capital and prevents it from forming an entity powerful enough to pose a challenge to imperialist hegemony.

The launching of Russia's Special Military Operation in Ukraine marked the beginning of a new era in world politics, where for the first time in decades, an effective effort to roll back the influence of Western imperialism has been made. A new era of world politics was opened on February 24th, 2022. This new era is marked by economic and geopolitical challenges to Western imperialism, and thereby finance capital. Although this is a hopeful development for the future of humanity to be able to evolve beyond imperialism, this resurgence of an effective challenge to the imperialist order is met with a resurgence of finance capital's standard tool in times of crisis: fascism. That means that in the coming years, the struggle shall intensify, along with all its tragic consequences for human suffering.

Since imperialism had become more vital to finance capital than it had been before WWII, fascism evolved from a tool for maintaining class relations within developed capitalist countries into a tool for maintaining imperialism. Therefore, there is no such thing as a fight against fascism without a fight against imperialism. Since imperialism is the maintenance of parasitic economic relations between imperialist core and periphery at the behest of finance capital, there is only one geopolitical bloc that fits this definition, and that is the West. Neither the state of Russia, nor of China, nor of Iran are subordinated to finance capital in their countries, nor can it be plausibly argued that their international economic relations are parasitic; their economic relations with other countries do not bring down living standards in those countries.

The main instruments of imperialism are NATO and its proxies, so to fight against fascism, it is imperative to fight for the dismantling of NATO and for its defeat in its imperialist wars. Wherever US influence is strong but threatened, the fascist threat looms strong; without the power of the US, neither the fascist militias in Ukraine such as Azov, Aidar, C14, Pravy Sektor and the like, nor the modern-day Einsatzgruppen committing genocide in Gaza would be able to operate in any meaningful capacity.

Within the Western countries, this means that the fight against fascism primarily consists of uniting all forces opposed to NATO to push back against this machine of imperialism. Fascism can only be defeated by destroying the

system that feeds it and gives it life. In many cases, this would even include rightist forces that are wrongly portrayed in left-liberal discourse as fascist. All who oppose the machine of Western imperialism are antifascist, whether they know it or not.

Outside of the Western countries, the countries of the world must stand together to destroy their domestic forces of fascism that are instrumentalized by the West to overthrow anti-imperialist, sovereignist, economic nationalist governments. Venezuela has recently been at the forefront of this struggle. In 2024, President Nicolás Maduro of Venezuela has taken the initiative to organize an *Antifascist International* for the purpose of uniting antifascist forces of the world. This international is based on the understanding that antifascism is inextricably linked to anti-imperialism, anti-Zionism and anticapitalism.

Additionally, the comrades from Korea's *People's Democratic Party* have taken the initiative of setting up the *World Anti-Imperialist Platform* (WAP), uniting anti-imperialist forces around the world. All true antifascist forces should seek to join both these initiatives as well, thereby connecting themselves to the forces that are at the forefront of the struggle against fascism and fascism's parents: finance capital and imperialism.

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